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ROAR READY FOR ADELAIDE CLASH

By Glenn Davis

After a 10-day break Miron Bleiberg's squad got back into full training last week with an intensive three-day training program.

Billed as a mini pre-season, the program has helped shake off the cobwebs and starts to refocus the players on the New Year bid to make the top four of the A-League.

Training for the Club World Championship qualifiers began way back in March of this year and as a result the squad have now been together for nearly 40 weeks.

Bleiberg said the recent break will have done the players a power of good and helped to recharge them both mentally and physically.

A notable absentee from the training squad was new Brazilian signing Reinaldo, who was not due to arrive in Brisbane until Sunday.

Bleiberg is looking to relax his players in the lead up to the January 1 clash with John Kosmina's league leaders, Adelaide United.

The Roar coach is keen to relieve the pressure on his squad in the hope that they can focus on one game at a time.

"We won't be emphasising anything to the players other than to go out and prove what a good side they are," Bleiberg said.

"We don't want to play our remaining games thinking about the finals or whether we will be involved or not.

"It's important that the team tries to play without that type of pressure in their minds and hopefully we will relax enough to play our best football.

"One thing I can guarantee is that we will be giving it everything in our last six games and all our opponents will know that they have been playing a good football team. If we don't make it to the finals ourselves we will certainly have a say in who does," he added.

Meanwhile Bleiberg says he does not hold a grudge but he will offer no niceties to Kosmina at their New Year's Day match at Hindmarsh Stadium.

After Adelaide's 2-1 win at Suncorp Stadium in October, a heated verbal exchange erupted between the pair.

Kosmina later admitted he told Bleiberg he would "smack him in the mouth" over comments made in the lead-up to that game.

Bleiberg said, while he respected Kosmina's coaching ability, he would be wary of approaching him for an after-match handshake.

"For my peace of mind I want to avoid any chance of confrontation," he said.

"I won't fall into the same trap twice, so I believe it is best if we just go our separate ways."

Kosmina also declared the spat was over.

The volatile former Brisbane Strikers coach was subdued when asked about the encounter, which marks the return of soccer's A-League from a one-month recess.

"People might try to make something of it, but that's finished as far as I'm concerned, said Kosmina.

"All we're focusing on is finishing the season strongly and consolidating top spot."

The Roar faces an uphill battle to remain in contention after the disappointing 1-1 draw against NZ Knights in their last game before Christmas.

Queensland must win most of their six games to be any chance of making the finals.

Defender Josh McCloughan returns for the trip to Adelaide after tearing a groin muscle in November.

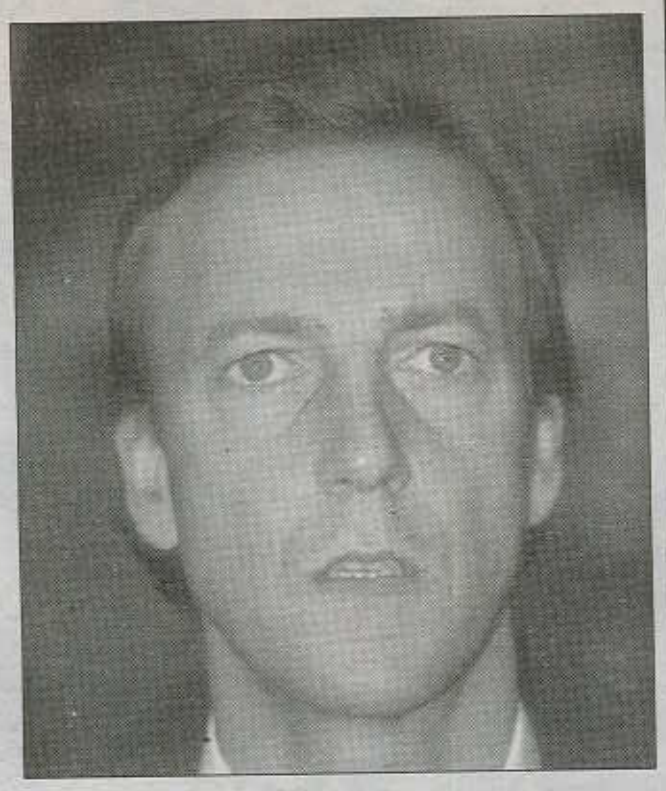
Neeskens joins Australia staff

As ABSW stated two weeks ago, Australian coach Guus Hiddink has added Johan Neeskens to his coaching staff.

Neeskens' appointment was confirmed by Football Federation Australia on Friday, though his role is yet to be defined, but it will become official this week.

He has been out of work since being sacked by NEC Nijmegen last season, but is expected to work with Hiddink as his assistant, along with Graham Arnold

Neeskens was with Hiddink during Holland's 1998 World Cup campaign.



Johan Neeskens: Australia's new assistant coach alongside Graham Arnold

SPECIAL REMINDER

To all ABSW readers, your Tuesday fix of the only football newspaper across Australia will take a 24-page format for the next three weeks due to the Christmas and New Years season vast approaching - so we won't be shutting shop for the festive season.

32 pages of your football fix will return on the 3rd of January 2006 but until then, enjoy the news, views and headlines that have hit our shores on the only game that counts - football. Enjoy

-Editor Mark Stavroulakis

Yeo exit upsets Knights

Manager John Adshead says his disappointment at losing striker Simon Yeo won't be accompanied by a hasty move by the New Zealand Knights to sign a replacement.

Yeo, the leading scorer for the A-League's bottom club, is heading back to England just six months into a three-year contract.

He cited personal and financial reasons, rather than footballing ones, for his move.

The Knights still hold Yeo's registration and cannot fill the gap in their squad until he joins another club.

"We've given him permission to go and talk with other clubs and sort his future out," Adshead said.

With the Knights having just six matches left, Adshead said there was no need to rush out and fill the vacancy created by Yeo's departure.

"Our situation won't change; we're not going to get off the bottom," he said.

"We will work hard to eke out as many points as we can. But there's no quick fix to what we're doing. There's no drama. There's no panic. It's just unfortunate we've lost a very good player."

Adshead said it was pity that injury and suspension meant the Knights' fans never saw the best of Yeo, who scored four of the club's 10 goals so far this season.

Meanwhile, Adshead said he couldn't comment on the issue of former skipper Danny Hay's future.

"It's nothing to do with me," he said.

"It's not a dressing room issue."

Hay, who has a three-year contract, was stood down from the Knights' last two matches before the December break after expressing strong views about aspects of the Knights' operations.

The former Leeds United defender, through the Professional Footballers Association's legal advisers, is understood to be having discussions with management about his future.

NZ Knights' under fire manager John Adshead

Yeo's departure follows that of defender Ronnie Bull, who returned to England last month for family reasons. Bull was replaced in the squad by All White Jeremy Christie.

Yeo, 32, said he wanted to stay in New Zealand, but he couldn't afford to because of financial issues surrounding mortgages he had on properties in England.

He also distanced himself from speculation of a players' revolt at the Knights.

He denied there had been a vote of no confidence in Adshead, although "a small number of players have in my view tried to undermine the gaffer and force the club's hand".

The Knights are next in action on December 30, when they are at home to second-place Sydney FC.

LaPaglia: Tie up Littbarski

Sydney FC shareholder and television star Anthony LaPaglia has called on his fellow directors to do all in their power to re-sign German coach Pierre Littbarski beyond this season.

The Hollywood star of Without a Trace watched on Friday as Sydney FC, flying among the pace-setters in the A-League, took out fifth-place in the FIFA Club World Championship in Tokyo with a 2-1 win over African team of the century, Al Ahly.

LaPaglia declared retaining Littbarski as coach is a must as the country's 'glamour club' attempts to establish themselves in the world football market.

"He must be retained as coach. I am firmly behind that," LaPaglia told The Sunday Telegraph.

Littbarski though, was not revealing anything about his plans after the completion of the A-League's inaugural season in March.

"I can't answer that. I can't tell you about my planning or expectations," the World Cup winner said.

"I'm a very practical person. One victory [in such a big tournament] doesn't decide whether I stay or go. More important is to build up something better than what we have now."

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Sao Paulo crowned Club World Champs

Brazil's Sao Paulo survived a second-half siege to beat European champions Liverpool 1-0 and win FIFA's Club World Championship in Japan on Sunday night.

Midfielder Mineiro latched on to a clever ball from Aloisio to fire past goalkeeper Pepe Reina in the 27th minute, giving the South American champions their third world title.

Liverpool dominated for large periods, had three goals disallowed and a late penalty appeal dismissed as they failed in their bid to become world champions for the first time.

"We knew one of the goals was a clear goal," said Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez. "I was disappointed how the situation was controlled by the referee."

"I try to have a lot of respect but we deserved to win. We had 21 shots, 17 corners, we hit the crossbar twice and had three goals disallowed. We controlled most of the game."

Mineiro's strike snapped Liverpool's club record of 11 successive clean sheets and was the first goal they had conceded in 1,042 minutes of play.

"It was my only chance and it was like winning the lottery," said Sao Paulo's hero. "I managed to keep calm and put it away without getting nervous."

Liverpool almost struck back moments after the goal when Luis Garcia flicked a Xabi Alonso corner onto the crossbar.

Rafael Benitez's side should have been in front as early as the second minute when Spanish striker Fernando Morientes missed the target with a point-blank header.

Garcia came close with two more headers and Gerrard blasted wide in the 35th minute after good work from Harry Kewell on the left.

Gerrard forced a superb save from Sao Paulo goalkeeper Rogerio Ceni with a curling free kick six minutes into the second half.

FIFA World Club Champions Sao Paulo

Garcia had a headed goal disallowed for offside and Morientes's spectacular overhead kick flashed just wide as Liverpool probed for an equaliser.

Mexican referee Benito Archundia also ruled out a Sami Hyypia effort after adjudging that Alonso's corner had curled out before the big Finn volleyed it home.

Archundia was unconvinced after substitute Peter Crouch looked to have been illegally blocked by two Sao Paulo defenders.

Substitute Florent Sinama Pongolle's late effort was then disallowed for offside, to the annoyance of Liverpool's players and most of the 68,000 crowd.

Sao Paulo won the World Club Cup - the tournament's forerunner, involving the champions of Europe and South America - in 1992 and 1993.

"We beat a great team," said Sao Paulo coach Paulo Autuori. "The only thing that's important in football is the final score. Football is about having a winner and a loser."

"If you lose you always try to make excuses."

Final Standings

1 – Sao Paulo
2 – Liverpool
3 – Deportivo Saprissa
4 – Al Ittihad
5 – Sydney FC
6 – Al Ahly

Oceania to join Asia playoffs?

FIFA chief Sepp Blatter said that the champions of Oceania could join the final round of Asian qualifiers for future World Cups.

Oceania's current "half" place could possibly shrink further if the regional winners had to join a group of Asian teams instead of being involved in a two-leg playoff.

"I think the solution will be to have the winner of the Oceania elimination join the Asian group," Blatter told reporters in Tokyo.

"I don't know if we will say it's a half slot or if they will go and play with Asia. At least they will have the possibility to fight to enter the World Cup."

Representing Oceania, Australia qualified for the World Cup for only the second time last month after beating Uruguay on penalties following a 1-1 stalemate over two games.

Despite qualifying for Germany through the region, the Socceroos had already committed to plans to leave Oceania to become part of the Asian Football Confederation.

New Zealand opposed Australia's move amid concern their defection could dilute the quality of the region and leave it vulnerable to FIFA politics.

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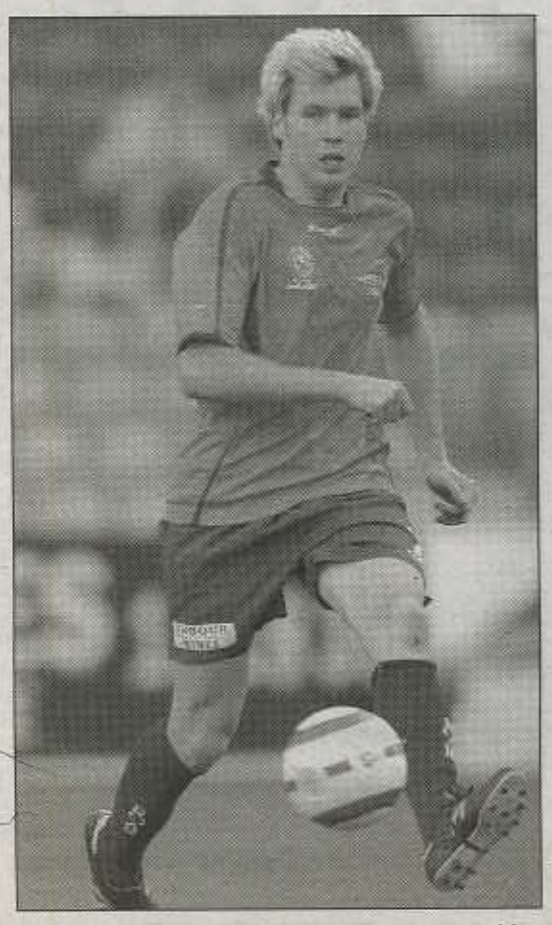
DODD STARTS THE EXODUS



Karl Dodd will call Romania home with club side Universitatea Craiova

By Marc Fox

At the end of November, Queensland Roar defender Karl Dodd became the first overseas A-League export when he put pen to paper on a four-and-a-half year deal with Romanian second division side Universitatea Craiova.

With the season only two months from closing, he is not expected to last.

In many ways Dodd, who enjoyed spells in the New South Wales and Queensland state leagues as well as a season with the Brisbane Strikers in the NSL, was not the player football officials would have selected to ignite any exodus.

The 25-year-old is a solid stopper who impressed during the first phase of the A-League with his straightforward defending and composure on the ball. Having made 11 starts for Miron Bleiberg's side as either a central defender of right-sided wing-back, he was a reliable A-League performer but perhaps not someone seen as in contention for a national team spot ahead of the World Cup finals in June.

Nevertheless, having trialled with the Romanian outfit before signing for the Roar only to have his hopes dashed by a second serious knee injury, his confident displays in Queensland were enough to convince Universitatea Craiova to offer a second chance.

"I'm elated to get this chance to play in Europe - it's something I've always wanted to do," Dodd said of his transfer to the side in pole position for an immediate return to Romania's top flight.

"I've just turned 25-years-old, I've had two knee reconstructions and I thought my chance had gone. I've been playing at the top level in Australia for a while and now I want to show what I can do in Europe."

Dodd's comments capture precisely the notion that an overseas allure still masks the beauty of staying home. Despite having taken numerous steps forward over the past year, the domestic league will, for some time, still struggle against the idea of playing in Europe. Sometimes, it seems, anywhere in Europe will do.

The concept of players leaving to join a club in higher echelons of the European game is one matter.

As is those fringe internationals based in the A-League who will seek additional game-time during the enforced domestic break ahead of the World Cup. Fans, owners and teammates can accept their star names pursuing a dream move overseas, something unable to be curtailed in a free transfer market.

But many believe agreeing a move to a second tier European league like Romania is a different proposition altogether.

A move to the Asian leagues might well generate a similar response. To some even moving to, say, the K-League or the J-League fails to generate any excitement. Statistics back such a position up. According to 2004 figures published by the International Federation of Football History and Statistics, the South Korean and Japanese leagues rank lower than Europe's second tier and are roughly on par with the best of African domestic football.

Given the difficulty in gauging the potential ranking of the A-League it's hard to make a judgement but following Sydney FC's outstanding form in the Club World Championships, you might throw Australia into that grouping too.

Despite their relative maturity, it's debatable whether a gulf exists between the elite Asian leagues and the A-League.

Recent transfer speculation has involved the likes of Archie Thompson and Nicky Carle moving to the K-League when the season ends in March. Although the timing is preferable to losing our stars to Europe during its January transfer window, the destination has still raised concerns. When discussing Carle's potential departure, Newcastle Jets football director Remo Nogarotto was dismissive of the K-League's appeal outside of being able to offer greater financial reward.

"If Arsenal come along and express an interest in Nicky Carle, it's one thing," Nogarotto told the Sydney Morning Herald.

"But Busan I'Park coming along, asking him to go on a blind trial, well to be honest that is treating Nicky, Newcastle, and the league in general with a degree of contempt.

"Players going to second tier markets, with all due respect to Korea, is not what the league needs at this stage of its development."

Australia to start at bottom

World Cup finalist and Asian newcomer Australia has been placed among the bottom rung of countries for next month's Asian Cup qualification draw.

Australia, who officially join the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) on January 1, 2006, has been placed in Pot D alongside Palestine, Sri Lanka, Chinese Taipei, Pakistan, Bangladesh and India.

The situation throws up the possibility of three World Cup finalists competing in a single qualifying group for the 2007 Asian Cup, to be hosted jointly by Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam.

"We are going on how the teams performed at the previous Asian Cup (2004, in China)," an AFC spokesman said.

"In this case, Australia do not have a record, so they are at the bottom. If we went according to FIFA rankings, of course, the situation would be different."

Australia is ranked 49th in the world and fifth among Asian teams.

But it is not enough to help them sneak into Pot A, which will contain World Cup finalists Japan and Iran, plus China, Bahrain, Uzbekistan and Jordan for the January 4 draw.

Pot B features two more countries playing in Germany next year - South Korea and Saudi Arabia - along with Iraq, Oman, Kuwait and Qatar.

The third tier, Pot C, will contain United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Singapore and Hong Kong.

Roos to start from the bottom of the pack in Asia

One country from each pot will be drawn on January 4 into six qualifying groups of four teams.

In the past, Pot D offered few worries for the stronger teams but, with Australia lurking, there will be some tense moments this time around.

Pakistan and Bangladesh are to play off in order to qualify for a place in Pot D.

At the end of the qualifiers, the top two teams from each of the six groups will advance to the finals.

Japan is the defending Asian champion, having beaten host China in the 2004 final in Beijing.

Dwight in tribute to Keane

Former Manchester United striker Dwight Yorke has hailed Roy Keane as a "fantastic leader" and says his former captain's qualities are rubbing off on him at A-League side Sydney FC.

"He had an influence on me and was a great leader and it was just an honour to play beside him and learn a great deal from him as a captain," Yorke said.

Yorke led Sydney to avoid the wooden spoon with a 2-1 win over Egypt's Al Ahly at the club world championship in Tokyo lastFriday night.

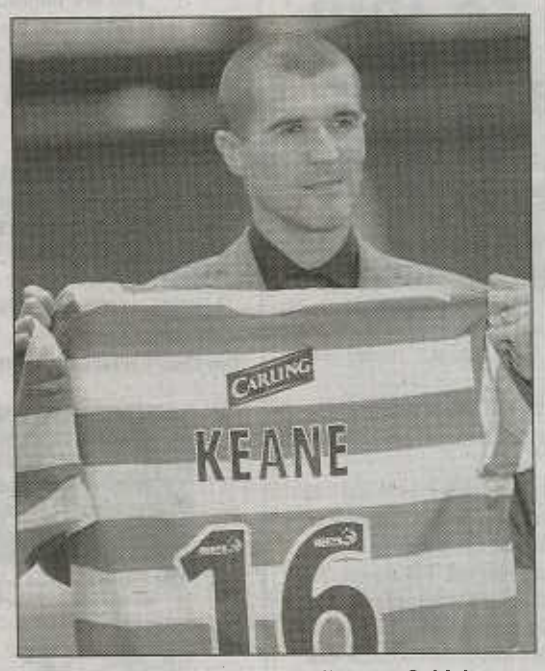
"I've got the role as captain (at Sydney) and I try to remember how he led the team," he added.

"I'm not trying to be Roy Keane in any way or form, but I picked up one or two things along the way and it feels great."

Yorke, who played with Keane in the United side that won the English Premier League, European Champions League and FA Cup treble in 1999, said he was not surprised at Keane's move to Celtic but was disappointed with the manner in which the Irish midfielder left the Reds.

Keane controversially parted with United after 12 years at Old Trafford following an argument with manager Alex Ferguson last month.

"It doesn't surprise me. I was disappointed he had to leave the club in the manner he did but everything comes to an end and Roy is a fantastic player and a fantastic leader," Yorke said.



Dwight Yorke paid a fitting tribute to Celtic's new signing Roy Keane

Leicester want more Aussies

Leicester City boss Craig Levein has handed trials to Australia international striker Joel Griffiths.

The 26-year-old has been playing for Swiss side Neuchatel Xamax.

Griffiths first attracted the attention of Foxes boss Craig Levein in the summer but any move was scuppered by Neuchatel's asking price of £450,000.

But he is now out of contract and is looking for a move to boost his chances of making the Socceroos squad for next summer's World Cup finals.

Leicester City has become a haven for Australian players and is becoming a mini Leeds United squad when it had the likes of Viduka, Kewell, Milosevic and a host of other Aussies in early 2000.

The Foxes have Danny Tiatto as their skipper while defender Patrick Kisnorbo and promising youngster James Wesolowski on its books.

Sydney FC's promising young defender Jacob Timpano had trials with the club early this season and it's said that he is still on the club's books.

2005 - football's year at last?

Only time will tell whether 2005 will be remembered as the year football came of age in Australia - but at the moment it certainly feels like it.

Australia's penalty shoot-out win over Uruguay to progress to the World Cup finals sparked a wave of celebration all over the country as people fell in love with the drama and spectacle of the code its boosters like to call "the world game".

It was the culmination of a roller-coaster year for the Australian national team, which finally won its fight to be allowed into the Asian confederation but traded old coach Frank Farina for Dutchman Guus Hiddink in the wake of a disappointing Confederations Cup campaign in Germany.

Then there was the A-League, which was launched amid a tidal wave of hype and claims that it would revolutionise a game which had looked on its last legs in the final days of the old NSL.

The League delivered early on, with crowd turn-outs which surpassed expectation and football which was consistently entertaining without hitting any great heights of technical sophistication.

Sydney's big-name signing Dwight Yorke brought some much needed overseas flair to proceedings but ageing Premiership hero Brian Dean failed to produce at Perth Glory, who went on to shed coach Steve McMahon as the Christmas break started.

The turnstile returns largely held up through the first part of the season, although it would be wrong to claim that the new comp has fully proved itself capable of living up to expectations.

Some clubs are still struggling to lure fans to games and the NRL-style inclusion of a New Zealand franchise has so far only served to provide the other teams with a reliable whipping boy.

The victorious Socceroos who sang their way to Germany next year

Liverpool fairytale

Overseas the year produced one outstanding moment in Liverpool's extraordinary win over AC Milan in the Champions League.

Again it came down to a penalty shoot-out after the Reds came back from 3-0 down at half-time to level the score in what AC coach Carlo Ancelotti called "six minutes of madness".

The match was memorable for all the wrong reasons for Liverpool's Australian star Harry Kewell, who was forced to hobble off after only 22 minutes as his troublesome groin injury finally gave way.

But it wasn't all bad. Kewell didn't know it then, but he would finish the year being feted as a hero for his part in Australia's World Cup qualifier win.

The match was a fitting 50th European Cup final and the most dramatic finale to a European club season since Manchester United beat Bayern Munich 2-1 in injury time to win the Champions League in 1999.

Liverpool's victory, albeit won under Spanish coach Rafael Benitez and with only two English players in the side, represented a huge success for English soccer which is increasingly in danger of losing its national identity.

Billionaire American tycoon Malcolm Glazer then took control of Manchester United and immediately saddled the club with hundreds of millions of pounds of debt as part of their purchasing strategy.

Angry fans reacted by forming a breakaway club which has started life in a minor league, but because most major English clubs are listed on the Stock Exchange and so, theoretically at least, permanently up for sale to the highest bidder, football in the birthplace of the game remains a volatile mix of sport, business and culture.

Another billionaire, Russian Roman Abramovich had a year to remember as his Chelsea won the English League title for the first time for 50 years.

He also, but somewhat less publicly, celebrated the success of CSKA Moscow when they became the first Russian side to win a European trophy, lifting the UEFA Cup with a 3-1 win over Sporting Lisbon in May.

Under scrutiny

Abramovich's links with CSKA through one of his former companies were regarded as significant enough for UEFA to investigate them, and illustrate yet again how the sport is becoming more and more commercialised.

An inquiry has been established by the European Union, with the support of FIFA and UEFA, to examine how soccer is run in Europe, taking a close look at some of its more unsavoury aspects.

Multi-club ownership, match-fixing, illegal gambling, money-laundering, growing racism, continuing hooliganism, the influence of agents and the growing demands of some of Europe's richer and more ambitious clubs, are all taxing the game's rulers.

But whether anything will change is a moot point.

FIFA president Sepp Blatter has said on numerous occasions that football must retain its human face and mistakes should be accepted as part of the game.

But with the World Cup fast approaching, FIFA may have missed a chance to help rid the game of some of those mistakes.

An experimental system using microchip software to help determine whether the ball had crossed the line fully for a goal was used at the under-17 world championships in Peru in September, but plans to use it at the World Cup have been shelved.

Instead, as ever, decisions will be left to linesmen and referees, who proved once again that they are just as fallible as everyone else.

Referee Robert Hoyzer was jailed for more than two years after accepting money to influence the outcome of matches in Germany's biggest soccer scandal for three decades.

He will watch the finals behind bars when the world turns its attention to Germany next year.

Farewells

It was also a sombre year for world football, as the sport farewelled some of its greatest talent.

One former giant of the game sadly will not be around to see the finals. George Best, the greatest player to come out of the British Isles, died in November aged 59 after years of alcohol abuse.

Benin's 18-year-old goalkeeper Samiou Yessoufou was murdered after his team lost to Nigeria in the African Youth championships in January and Utrecht defender David Di Tommaso died in his sleep aged 26 last month.

Off the field, former African Player of the Year George Weah ran for president of Liberia and only just failed to bring off a victory.

On the pitch in Africa, Egypt's Al Ahly went 55 matches without losing, one of the longest unbeaten runs of all time until Saudi Arabia's Al Ittihad defeated them 1-0 in the opening match of the FIFA Club World Championship.

In South America, Brazil returned to their imperious best, going into the hat for the World Cup draw last Friday as world champions, Copa America champions, Confederations Cup champions and hot favourites to win a record sixth world title next year.

They finished top of the two-year, 10-team, 18-match World Cup qualifying marathon on goal difference from Argentina in October.

Sao Paulo were crowned continental champions with victory in an all-Brazilian Libertadores Cup final against Atletico Paranaense in July, qualifying for the club world championship in Japan.

The outstanding individual feat, however, belonged to Argentine forward Carlos Tevez who inspired Corinthians to the Brazilian championship title in December in a tough environment for an Argentine given the football rivalry between the two countries.

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Aussie World Cup tickets on sale

Football Federation Australia announced that their allocation of tickets for the Qantas Socceroos matches at the 2006 FIFA World Cup would go on sale from 9am AEDST Tuesday 20 December and at the same time sent out a strong warning to people that they would be risking huge disappointment if they bought tickets or packages elsewhere.

As a competing nation at the tournament the FFA has been appointed as the only official Australian source of FIFA World Cup tickets and tours for Australian matches and already some travel operators are offering packages with no guarantee of match tickets.

Official ticket packages with travel and accommodation if required will be available to be applied for from Tuesday with full information on packages available to be viewed now online at www.footballaustralia.com.au.

Applicants will be required to download an application form via www.footballaustralia.com.au which will be made available from 9am AEDST on Monday 19 December, and return the completed form by email, fax or mail from 9am AEDST Tuesday 20 December.

Applications received prior to 9am AEDST Tuesday December 20 will not be processed. Tickets and packages will be processed on a first-come first-served basis after 9am AEDST Tuesday 20 December. The offer closes on 31 December 2005.

This process and these dates represent a slight adjustment to previously published information. This has been made in order to ease expected pressure in light of apparent larger than expected demand, and to accommodate FIFA approvals.

Approximately 8,500 ticket packages across Australia's three group stage matches, plus 12-night travel and accommodation programs if required, will go on sale starting from as little as $1,970 plus flights.

FFA CEO Mr John O'Neill said that buying through the FFA was the best way to ensure guaranteed tickets, accommodation and travel.

"Since qualifying we have worked hard with FIFA in a short period of time to turn around a travel program which aims to cater for the various needs of supporters wanting a world cup experience," said Mr O'Neill.

"Travel and accommodation to and within Germany will be in high demand, and FFA packages will include all transfers plus exclusive benefits including access to current and past Qantas Socceroos."

"It will also ensure that Australian fans are sitting together. Those that buy from outside this program may find themselves sitting with opposition fans – or on the street!"

"Whether you want the full five-star treatment or budget camping and hostel arrangements, the options are there for everyone."

Special value-added benefits, including tours hosted by former national team players Frank Farina and Robbie Slater, city tours, functions and access to Socceroos training are also available only through the official FFA program.

"The FFA has put together some great options for all fans who want to cheer Australia on at the tournament," said Mr Farina.

"Demand will be huge as it is the biggest sporting event in the world and the chance to see the Socceroos play Brazil at a World Cup will be truly a memorable life experience."

Mr Slater backed the program and encouraged fans to buy through this official channel.

"The FFA has worked hard to have a fair system in place that guarantees tickets, travel and accommodation to Australian sports fans," said Mr Slater.

"It's going to be such a great event to attend and I'd hate to think that people will have their experience ruined because they bought through a different avenue and ended up without tickets."

FFA access to tickets for the second round of the tournament and beyond is dependent on Australia qualifying. As per FIFA rules applicants can speculatively book these match tickets/packages now and must pay up front. Costs of tickets will be refunded in the event that Australia does not progress.

FFA is working closely with the Local Organising Committee in an attempt to secure additional tickets at a later date.

Australia Post helping Roos cause

In a coup for die hard Socceroo fans across Australia, the Australia Post is helping Australian's celebrate the moment that propelled the Qantas Socceroos to Germany with the release of a Souvenir Stamp Sheet.

Several images from the final qualification match against Uruguay are featured on the Souvenir Stamp Sheet that is available now as the perfect Christmas gift for all keen football fans around the country.

The Australian team making the FIFA World Cup for only the second time has united Aussie sports fans like few other moments in our history, and Australia Post is thrilled to help celebrate this achievement, stated Mr Noel Leahy, Group Manager Philatelic, Australia Post.

This Souvenir Stamp Sheet is a truly unique collectible to be treasured for a lifetime, and it is the perfect Christmas present for football fans counting down the days to Germany.

With the title Australia Qualifies, the Souvenir Stamp Sheet features ten 50-cent kangaroo and flag stamps with the Australian team logo featured on the stamp tabs.

Several images that capture the magic of Telstra Stadium on Wednesday 16th November are featured in the background of the Stamp Sheet including Mark Schwarzer's heroic diving save, John Aloisi with his fingers pointed in the air in celebration and the Qantas Socceroos rising as one when Aloisi's penalty struck the back of the net.

Two details which will be forever etched in the memory of those who witnessed the event the final score and the date are also featured on the Souvenir Stamp Sheet which will retail for $15.95 from participating Australia Post outlets.

"The support that the Australian team has received from the Australian public since qualifying for Germany has been outstanding", stated Mr John O'Neill AO, Chief Executive Officer, Football Federation Australia.

"For Australia Post to recognise the Qantas Socceroos on this Souvenir Stamp Sheet is a sensational tribute to the team and to the sport.

"Hopefully people will buy the stamps and send them to their friends and family all over the world to let them know that Australia is on its way to Germany".

This is the first time that that the Qantas Socceroos have featured on a Souvenir Stamp Sheet.

The Australian Post Special Edition Socceroo stamps in all its splendor

You'd be smiling too if you were earning $12.5 million like Liverpool's Harry Kewell

Socceroos in Aussie rich list

The lavish life of an Aussie footballer playing overseas football in Europe has been highlighted during this year's yearly round up of the nation's richest sport stars.

Eight members of the Guus Hiddink's Socceroos squad featured in the top of the crop amongst other notable stars from other sports. Liverpool's pony tail striker Harry Kewell is second on the list at $12.5 million, and goalkeeper and known hero Mark Schwarzer's two penalty saves against Uruguay alone make the $3.5 million he earns seem a bargain.

Middlesbrough's Mark Viduka has hit the $6 million mark while Everton midfielder Tim Cahill ($4.5 million) are the other Socceroos featuring in the top 15.

Cahill especially has hit the top of the pile after his new deal that he tied up with the Toffees at the start of this season.

Golfer Greg Norman predictably topped the list of Australia's sports earners in 2005.

WOLLONGONG NEWS

By Otto Bader

Hints for Germany next year

Australia's Group F games are scheduled to be played in the southern cities of Germany – Kaiserslautern , Munich and Stuttgart.

The three cities are, looking at the location map, are placed in a triangle – in the middle Stuttgart, 200 km west is Kaiserslautern and approximately another 200 km south of Stuttgart is Munich.

In between these three places are hundreds of smaller cities or villages with easy access by car or public transport to book accommodation case you travel on your own.

Group travel packages take care of all of that.

The main problem at the moment is to buy tickets for the three Australian games – try bookings on www.footballaustralia,com.au and good luck.

A considerable number of Illawarra local fans made contact, looking for information.

South Coast travel agencies hope for a bonanza, they have every right to expect plenty o bookings to travel to Germany next year. Hardly any other sporting event does attract such interest in the world.

Looking Ahead In local Football

The IFA (association) has a preliminary playing calendar for 2006 prepared subject to changes if forced upon by unforeseen circumstances.

At present the football-program kicks off with the Corrimal Leagues Club knockout on Sunday 5th February 2006.

This pre-season tournament, played over four weekends was started 1962, now going into the 44th year sponsored continuously by the Corrimal Leagues Club.

The inaugural 1962 winner was EPT (now Port Kembla) and in 2005 Bulli won in a penalty shootout against Kemblawarra.

Interest to participate has been expressed as far away as from the ACT with Canberra Deakin, O'Connor Knights, Cooma and the AIS team making contact with the IFA as to a possible entry playing here in the knockout.

If accepted, over 32 teams would take part in the Corrimal Leagues club event.

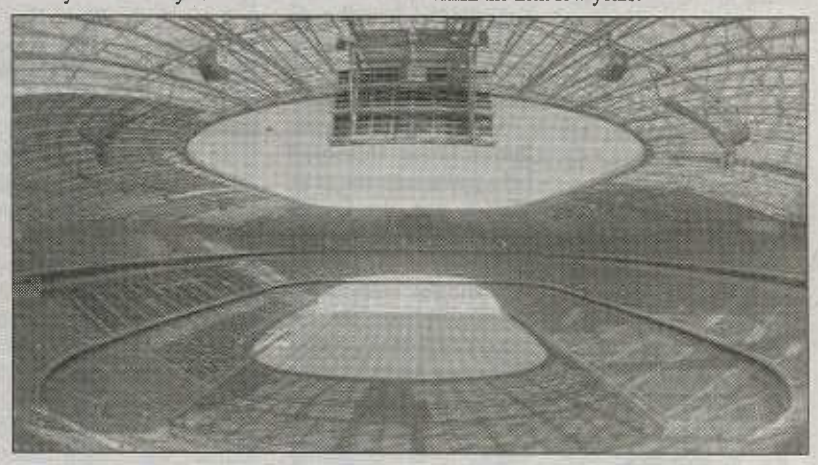
This outside Illawarra interest attracted can be seen as a compliment as to the quality of playing standard in our region. Certainly more fans would take a curious view at the new teams if appearing at the local venues.

The Illawarra football season proper is due to kick-off on Saturday 4th March 2006. Once again 28 clubs with three grades have been admitted playing in two competitions – 14 clubs with Youth, Reserves and First Grade are contesting the honours in Premier League plus 14 clubs with three grades also competing in the First Division.

Official finish of local soccer is planned for October 7th with the Grand Final in Premier League.

Local soccer goes into it's 103rd year – founded 1903 from humble beginnings in an attempt to form the football association.

Actually local soccer club Balgownie Rangers were established 1883 playing sporadically against Sydney teams plus later locals like Thirroul, founded 1887, Corrimal founded 1891, Northern Illawarra Rovers 1882, Parka Meadow 1888, Woonona 1889 plus several newcomers being established within the next few years.



The magnificent Munich Stadium where the Socceroos will face Brazil in their second match of their FIFA World Cup campaign

Yeo released by Knights

New Zealand Knights have released striker Simon Yeo. Yeo's agent, Jason Dunford, says the striker wants a return to former club Lincoln City, despite the likes of Tranmere Rovers and Doncaster Rovers seeking talks.

He told the Lincolnshire Echo: "Simon is desperate to get back to Lincoln, he feels like a Lincoln person, given the relationship he enjoyed with the fans.

"They're in his heart and Simon is ready to reject other clubs. The ball is firmly in Lincoln's court. I don't think they would have to break the bank to get him either. When you are regarded by the fans like he is, then money doesn't even come into the equation." Dunford added: "He went out to New Zealand to give it a go and it takes a big man to admit he got it wrong and come back. Simon enjoyed the football, but he was misguided on a few aspects by people out there.

"Now he is on his way back - and he's looking forward to it."

Yeo ended up the club's top scorer during it's mid-season break with four goals to his name.

His loss for the hapless Knights will be a big one as whenever the side looked like scoring it was through the Englishman.

Yeo leaves his strike partner Sean Devine as the lone marksman alongside Kiwi youngster Kris Bright who is set to fill Yeo's shoes.

Whether coach John Adshead wants to sign a short-term player remains to be seen as the full transfer season has ended in the A-League till next season.

Back to England for NZ Knights striker Simon Yeo

Teenage Dario, Signs Contract with the Queensland Roar

DARIO VIDOSIC: Teenage striker signs for the Roar.

DYNAMIC talented striker, Dario Vidosic, was last week rewarded for his continued progress with a two-year contract with Queensland Roar, beginning next season.

Eighteen-year-old Vidosic will occupy one of the three mandatory under 20-year-old spots on the playing roster. With current defender Ben Griffin already signed to take another, Roar now only have one vacancy left to fill in the under 20 ranks for the 2006 / 2007 Hyundai A-League season.

To give him more playing experience, Vidosic recently took part in the Queensland State Cup, turning out for Pine Rivers United, where he scored the winning goal in the final against Far North Queensland in Cairns.

The young goalscorer had previously featured in Hyundai A-League pre-season games against Sydney FC, Central Coast Mariners, Newcastle Jets, Melbourne Victory and Adelaide United with assured performances that belied his tender years.

The Roar's Head-Coach Miron Bleiberg is already planning for next season by securing the services of Vidosic and Griffin and is pleased that both have put pen to paper.

"Dario is an extremely talented player and always has been. From 2004 when he was a reserve team player at Queensland Lions he has undergone a growth spurt which has taken him from 168cm to 184cm. He is now working very hard in the gym to build up his physique and has already gone from 65kg to 74kg. The target is to get him to 78kg," said Bleiberg.

"We are delighted that he has signed and look forward to watching him blossom," he added.

With silky skills, a deft touch and a keen eye for goal, Vidosic is primed for a bright future in the game and has already represented Australia at schoolboy level and in the Australian Futsal team.

Dario has also been offered a scholarship with the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) and could take part in the Asian Qualifying rounds for the 2007 World Youth Championship Finals (to be held in Canada) as part of the Australian Under 20's squad.

After his AIS commitments are completed he will then join Queensland Roar in preparation for the 2006 / 2007 season. It's set to be a big year for the youngster but he is more than relishing the prospect.

"I'm very excited to be officially part of the Roar set-up. Whenever I go to Suncorp Stadium to watch the team I get a big buzz, but now that I am going to be included in the squad for next year I just can't wait for it all to start – it's going to be fantastic," he said.

The level-headed Vidosic also said he was overjoyed to have been offered his chance at the AIS.

"To reach the level of the high achievers at the AIS was always a goal of mine from a very young age, so to have finally made it to that level is very gratifying. To have a chance to be a part of the first generation of players to play their qualifiers in the Asian Confederation is also very exciting for me."

"It's a much greater challenge to have to qualify for the Youth World Cup through the Asian groups and hopefully we can do well. The higher level of competition in Asia will leave us better prepared and more battle-hardened if we make it to the finals," said Vidosic.

By Neil Favager

Victory not signing Teddy

Melbourne Victory has moved swiftly to quash rumours that it has approached English Premier League player Teddy Sheringham to take a player/coach role next season.

Melbourne Victory Chairman Geoff Lord reaffirmed the club's support of incumbent Ernie Merrick, pointing to Victory's philosophy of building a team for the future.

"I can categorically confirm that the club has not approached Teddy Sheringham," Lord said.

"It's very easy for people to make outlandish claims anonymously, and I'd invite whoever is responsible for these rumours to stand up and be counted publicly."

ABSW interviewed Merrick and stated that he plans to see out his three-year contract.

"It's the nature of the job and there is always pressure applied to the coach in producing results. It is a passionate game which it then allows the fan to be very critical.

Teddy Sheringham has not been approached by the Melbourne Victory

"I really don't take notice of what is written in certain papers and internet forums about me and the team.

"I just want to do the job on and that's steer the side towards the right direction and playing good football which also means winning as many games as possible."

There are talks with a certain Brazilian midfielder that should be close to signing for next season so the Victory will have a few changes in it's squad.

"We will no doubt be looking at signing a Brazilian for next season as we would love to add some Brazilian flair to our team."

In other news, Melbourne Victory today announced the appointment of interim CEO, John Harris.

Harris, who is also Chairman of the Selpam Group, a cornerstone investor in the club, will fill the role of CEO while the club seeks a new full time Chief.

Harris takes over from Darren Gosling, who now returns to Belgravia Leisure full time, after dedicating himself to the establishment of the club over the last 12 months.

Melbourne Victory Chairman, Geoff Lord, paid tribute to Gosling, stressing that the objectives of his initial appointment had not only been achieved, but in most cases exceeded.

"Darren has done a terrific job building the foundation of a great club," Lord said. "His role was always an interim appointment due to his obligations with Belgravia Leisure and the time has come for us to embark upon a search for a full time replacement."

Gosling was happy to be leaving the club in such a strong position.

"In the space of barely 12 months we've been able to build an icon brand, attract a loyal following and entice the best sponsor possible, Samsung, to the club," he said.

"The future for Melbourne Victory is very promising and I'm sure the club will continue to go from strength to strength."

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Adelaide back foreigners

Adelaide United are backing a push for limits on foreigners.
United assistant coach Aurelio Vidmar yesterday backed the stance made by FIFA president Sepp Blatter last week. He wants to impose minimum five-player foreign quotas for all teams in all leagues. Vidmar told the Sunday Mail: "You'd have to be careful about who we bring back to the A-League.
"You'd want the better ones to come back. There's a hundred or so (Australians) over there (in Europe) who could possibly come back tomorrow."
He continued: "For years we've continued to develop quality players. "At the first chance they get at 17 and 18, they're off (to Europe). We start to develop them, but we're not reaping the rewards.
"But now if that ruling does come in, the good players can play here until they're 22 and 23.
"The cream will rise to the top and the best ones will never have a problem getting contracts overseas."

Sydney to build on success

Sydney FC are aiming to use their successful Club World Championship campaign as a launching pad to drag back A-League leaders Adelaide United.
"This has given the lads an insight into what it takes to be a professional," skipper Dwight Yorke told the Sydney Morning Herald.
"Of course, that comes with a price, and that's hard work. But this has whetted my appetite, and hopefully it will inspire the other lads to try and become champions at home.
"We're still in with a shout, we know Adelaide have the five-point lead, but they still have to come to our place and that should make it interesting. Hopefully we can take this home and build on it."
Coach Pierre Littbarski also said: "We have figured out that we are capable of playing a good pressing game, and we will take that back to the A-League.
"In the A-League, everybody is hunting us, so we need strong players to survive. They will get a lot of confidence because a victory like this is always a great memory."

Milosevic breaks silence

New Zealand Knights goalkeeper Danny Milosevic has broken ranks and spoken out over Danny Hay's situation with the club.
Hay was stood down as captain and told to stay to away after expressing his concerns to management about the club's direction.
Milosevic said there was widespread support among the players for Hay.
"If you can't support the captain then you shouldn't be at the club. He's a leader and a spokesman for us all. He's our voice."
Milosevic confirmed there was a team meeting, at which the majority of players voted that they had lost confidence in the coaching staff.
"There was a meeting called and the players had a chance to vote," he told the Herald on Sunday.
"They were under no duress. If you wanted to take part, it was an individual decision."
Milosevic realised that "some people might be disappointed in me" for talking publicly but felt that "honesty is the best policy".
"Decisions need to be made but if people aren't prepared to make them it makes life difficult. It begins at the top in the boardroom and decisions need to be made in all areas, and that also goes for playing staff. They have to make hard calls.
"We can't go along this road because it's... unsustainable and people aren't coming to watch us. It's not rocket science."
Milosevic also questioned Simon Yeo's comments made after confirming he was leaving the club.
"I'm amazed why he had to say stuff the day he was leaving," he said. "He didn't attend the meeting anyway. When you see players leaving, you don't hear the full story. As a player you wonder why they are leaving. What sort of atmosphere does it create for the rest? Doesn't he have the bollocks to say why he's leaving? You start to wonder just why Ronnie Bull [who returned to the UK in November] and Simon Yeo left."
Meanwhile coach John Adshead says they won't rush to replace Yeo after he left the club last week.
"We've given him permission to go and talk with other clubs and sort his future out," Adshead told NZPA.
With the Knights having just six matches left, Adshead said there was no need to rush out and fill the vacancy created by Yeo's departure.
"Our situation won't change; we're not going to get off the bottom," he said.
"We will work hard to eke out as many points as we can. But there's no quick fix to what we're doing. There's no drama. There's no panic. It's just unfortunate we've lost a very good player."
"This is a sad day for the family and not one that we ever thought would happen," Yeo said.
"When we came out we sold all our possessions with the intention of staying long-term. Unfortunately some property investments back home are not working out as hoped and combined with the exchange rate and need to send money back each month has meant we simply have to return."

A-LEAGUE LADDER

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Adelaide United	15	10	2	3	23	18	32
Sydney FC	15	8	3	4	27	21	27
Newcastle Jets	15	7	3	5	21	17	24
Perth Glory	15	6	4	5	23	19	22
Central Coast Mariners	15	5	5	5	23	22	20
Melbourne Victory	15	5	4	6	20	16	19
Queensland Roar	15	4	6	5	14	14	18
New Zealand Knights	15	1	1	13	10	34	4

Up and coming Fixtures
Round 16
Thursday 29 December
Melbourne Victory — Perth Glory
Friday 30 December
New Zealand Knights — Sydney FC
Saturday 31 December
Central Coast Mariners — Newcastle Jets
Sunday 1 January 2006
Adelaide United — Queensland Roar
*A-League sides have taken a mid-season break and will resume their matches on the 29th of December 05

FIXTURES AND UPDATES

Sydney FC's Terry McFlynn in action against Deportivo Saprissa in Tokyo

dressing sheds

by Mark Stavroulakis

Frankly, it's good

Didn't burn any bridges with the FFA – former Roos coach Frank Farina (centre) flanked by FFA CEO John O'Neill (far left) and Robbie Slater (2nd from left) with some German girls

Former Socceroos coach Frank Farina appreciates the value of not burning his bridges.
He may have been sacked in June but six months later he's sub-contracting for Football Federation Australia (FFA), running guided tours to next year's World Cup with fellow former Socceroo Robbie Slater.
Given he presided over the national team for six years in the most tumultuous period of the code's history in Australia, you could have forgiven him for walking away, at least from the peak body.
But a love of the game and the "opportunities" Australia's World Cup qualification has presented, has ensured Farina hasn't strayed too far from the flock.
"S**t happens, as they say. Look, I had a good run, I had six years," Farina said on Friday at the FFA's launch of its ticket sales for the World Cup.
"I always maintained that the game is bigger than anyone - any group or any individual."
"It's just not in my character and not in my nature to be that way."
Farina remains cordial with FFA chief executive John O'Neill, and has lined up other World Cup work with BSkyB in London, radio in Australia and some potential television roles.

"From my perspective I am very happy. There are a lot of opportunities for everyone involved in the game and I will always be involved in football," he said.
"I always maintained a good relationship with the FFA and John and that's the way it should be."
And he intends on hanging round, at least for the time being.
"Whether it's with the FFA or with a club here in Australia or overseas I'll definitely be staying involved," Farina said.
"You never say never in this game."
"Further down the track in terms of coaching I'm still young and whatever opportunities present themselves you've got to consider them."
Farina believes Australia has a great opportunity to get through to the second round of the tournament in June next year but it almost entirely hinges on the first-up result against Japan.
"If we can beat Japan I believe we will go through to the next phase, anything less than a win will make it very difficult for us," he said.

Source - AAP

Everton pin hopes on Cahill

Everton hope the return of Australian international midfielder Tim Cahill from a three-match suspension will help reignite their climb away from the relegation zone.
Cahill, who missed the English Premier League club's last three matches after being found guilty of violent conduct during their victory over Newcastle last month has been itching to play for the Toffees in what has been a disappointing season.
"Obviously Tim has had a really hard couple of years with the amount of international football he has been playing during the summer months," Everton assistant boss Alan Irvine told the Liverpool Echo.
"And of course there are the demands of moving up from the Championship to the Premiership.
"This has been an opportunity to get a little bit of a breather and in actual fact we have given him some time off.
"Hopefully that has helped him to recharge his batteries and feel refreshed for when he comes back."
Before his suspension, Cahill had played 20 matches this season for club and country, including the recent World Cup play-off matches against Uruguay in South America and Sydney.
It wasn't the best start for Cahill upon his return after Everton suffered a damaging 4-0 home loss to Bolton last Saturday.
Calls have already been heeded for David Moyes' head from Everton fans who have seen the Blues fall from grace after a terrific last season.

Mariners on the mend

The Central Coast Mariners will be boosted by the return of three players for their New Years Eve clash against the Newcastle United Jets; Paul O'Grady, Dean Heffernan and Tom Pondeljak, but will be without ace marksman Nick Mrdja for the rest of the season.
Mrdja has yet to make his Hyundai A-League debut after injuring his knee in the Pre-Season Cup final against the Perth Glory, and is set for further time on the sidelines after scans revealed his injury is still some time away from healing.
The prolonged absence of the star striker has been a cruel blow to the Mariners, who benefited from two of Mrdja's hat tricks en route to consecutive final appearances in the pre season calendar.
"I have no doubts that if Nick was fit, he'd be the top scorer in the Hyundai A-League," said Mariners Football Manager Lawrie McKinna.
"His ability to finish is something that we've really missed, but players like Stewart Petrie and John Hutchinson have performed superbly when given their chance.
"Nick is now focused on being right for next season and the prospect of seeing him fit and firing again is certainly something to look forward to."
Perhaps the most awaited comeback, however, is that of attacking linchpin Tom Pondeljak, who has been sidelined since late October with a fractured and dislocated wrist suffered in Auckland against the New Zealand Knights.
The three-time NSL Championship winner has also commenced full training and will make his ninth appearance of the season against the Jets should his recovery remain consistent in the coming weeks.
"For Christmas, I asked for Mrdja, Pondeljak and O'Grady back fit, and they say two out of three aint bad," said McKinna.
"When you add Heffernan to that equation, we've got a lot more options to choose from against the Jets and that's something we haven't had in a long time."
Goalkeeper John Crawley and youth international defender Nigel Boogaard are the Mariners only other injury concerns, with the latter making significant progress from a bout of glandular fever.

Wolves in trouble?

News around the grapevines is that Former NSL champions and now NSW Premier League outfit the Wollongong Wolves could be folding without even kicking a ball this season.
Wollongong has appointed Jock Molando as it's CEO and a man that could spearhead their campaign to a brighter start.
It would be a shame if the league losses one of it's historical teams like the Wolves who have given so much to the game at all levels.
It is still not known who will coach the Wolves but Eddie Tesoro has been one name mentioned as a possible manager.

Simunic relishes Roos showdown

AUSTRALIAN-born Croatian international Josip Simunic was sure he was set for a Socceroos' showdown at the World Cup even before last week's draw.

It was there in his dreams.

"I knew we were going to get Australia," says Simunic.

"I had a dream we were going to get Brazil and Australia in our group, and when I saw Brazil and Australia in the group together, I was 100 per cent sure that was where we would be in the tournament."

Simunic is one of three Australian-born players likely to feature in the Croatian squad for Germany 2006, along with midfielder Ante Seric and goalkeeper Joey Didulica.

The 27-year-old – an Australian Institute of Sport graduate – is eagerly awaiting the June 22 World Cup match against the Socceroos in Stuttgart, a fixture which may well decide second place in group F and passage through to the second round.

But key defender Simunic isn't at all concerned about being the target of any backlash in his country of birth.

"I don't really care what anyone says or anyone thinks, that doesn't worry me at all," Simunic told AAP from Germany.

"I've been through a lot in my football career and I'm very thankful to a lot of people... and when someone says to me on the streets I'm a traitor or a villain, I don't care really.

"Australia is a free country and everyone's able to say and think what they want. So it doesn't worry me at all."

The June 22 match will provide plenty of cross-cultural interest as the Socceroos are likely have as many as seven players, including skipper Mark Viduka, of Croatian heritage in their final squad.

Croatia have been impressive, emerging unbeaten from their European World Cup qualifying group.

But, while Croatian coach Zlatko Kranjcar and federation president Vlatko Markovic have both suggested their team should ease past Australia and fellow group F opponents Japan into the second round, Simunic is not so dismissive of the Socceroos.

"Australia is a big threat... I see both (the Socceroos and Japan) as dangerous but more Australia because a lot of players are playing in Europe," he said.

"If you take a team too lightly that's the biggest mistake you can make... Australia is a very, very, good team, they have very, very good players and they play at a lot of very good European clubs."

Simunic, currently with Hertha BSC Berlin in the Bundesliga but hopeful of soon landing a deal with a "bigger club in a bigger league", rejected offers to play for Australia before making his senior international debut with Croatia in 2001.

The former Melbourne Knights NSL defender admits it was a tough decision, made when he was "very young", but one to which he remains "100 per cent" committed.

Since debuting in 2001 he has represented Croatia 39 times, playing at both the 2002 World Cup and 2004 European Championships.

Simunic, though, admits Australia remains close to his heart.

He watched the final moments of the Socceroos' World Cup play-off triumph over Uruguay last month after rushing home from training, and immediately sent Australian technical director Ron Smith, his former mentor at the AIS, a congratulatory text message.

When the German league begins its mid-season break next week, Simunic will be straight on a plane back to Australia to spend Christmas with his family.

And with news of the A-League's promising start filtering through to Europe, Simunic also revealed a desire to again play football in Australia in the future.

Of the three Australia-born players, Simunic shapes as the most crucial to Croatia's World Cup hopes.

Barring injury, he will also likely be the only one of the trio to start all three games in the group phase against Brazil (June 14), Japan (June 18) and Australia.

On playing the Socceroo he said: "I'm looking forward to seeing them before the game, during the game and after the game."

> **"I don't really care what anyone says or anyone thinks, that doesn't worry me at all.**
> **"I've been through a lot in my football career and I'm very thankful to a lot of people... and when someone says to me on the streets I'm a traitor or a villain, I don't care really.**
> **"Australia is a free country and everyone's able to say and think what they want. So it doesn't worry me at all."**
> *– Josip Simunic*

Ready for the big test will be Australian born defender Josip Simunic who will play with Croatia in Germany next year

Preston to host East Timorese side

The Preston Lions will face a team of East Timorese-Australian soccer players in a friendly game as part of their lead up to the 2006 Victorian Premier League season.

To be played on Sunday 8 January 2006, the event is a joint initiative of the Darebin City Council, the Friends of Baucau and the Preston Lions Football Club.

The match will close the 2005 Timor Cup tournament and will help buy sports equipment and raise funds for youth projects in the District of Baucau in East Timor. Renowned Melbourne band, the Dili All Stars, will also play on the day to support the event.

The Timor Cup tournament is an annual sporting event that brings together East Timorese soccer teams from all around the country in a friendly and fun competition. This year marks the 10th Anniversary of the event in Australia.

The tournament will kick off on Sunday 27 December and the Grand Final will be played on 6 January 2006. Games will be held at the Preston Lions' home ground, B.T. Connor Reserve, Broadhurst Avenue, in Reservoir.

President of the Preston Lions Football Club, Chris Todorovski, said that the club is proud to be playing a small part in such a worthwhile cause.

"Whilst Preston is a club that is traditionally backed by Australia's large Macedonian community, this does not preclude us from lending a helping hand to other communities in any way that we can. We look forward to welcoming the East Timorese community to BT Connor Reserve in a fun and social environment and we hope that the Preston Lions fans will come out in full force to support this initiative on January the 8th," Todorovski concluded.

Meanwhile the Lions have completed the biggest recruiting coup of the pre-season with the arrival of two high-profile international players. Stephen Weah, a Liberian international who is the cousin of former World Player of the Year George Weah, and former Macedonian international goalkeeper Goce Gruevski, have joined the team for its assault on the 2006 Victorian Premier League.

Weah, 28, had previously been on trial with A-League clubs Sydney FC and the Queensland Roar and has already forged a successful career in Asia scoring close to 100 goals from nearly 150 league games.

A striker who possesses lethal foot power, Weah has also been capped 12 times for his country scoring eight international goals, and his aerial dominance will add an extra element to Preston's potent strike force.

Preston Lions' new signing Liberian international Stephen Weah (Photo by Nome Risteski)

Gruevski, 31, comes to Preston from the Republic of Macedonia with over 13 years of experience in the Macedonian first division which has included stints at Rabotnicki Kometal, Vardar Skopje, Pobeda Prilep, and more recently Madzari and Sloga FC.

With nine senior caps to his name for the Macedonian national team and a further four at Under 21 level, the goalkeeper's international experience will prove to be invaluable as the season progresses.

According to the club's Football Administration Coordinator, Vlad Bogoevski, the arrival of both players sends a clear sign to the rest of the competition that the Lions mean business in 2006.

"Whilst we were disappointed with the way things finished off last season, we knew that we had the nucleus of a successful team comprising a good mix of youth and experience. In Weah and Gruevski, we have now acquired two world class footballers who will add an extra touch of class and experience to the squad.

"Weah is already an accomplished goal scorer and will fill the void left by outgoing captain John Sapazovski up front, whilst Gruevski will have a fight on his hands to snatch away the number one goalkeeping spot from the much improved Daniel Zilic.

"The squad has really started to take shape over the past month and Vlado Vanis (the coach) is confident that he has a side capable of going all the way in 2006," Bogoevski concluded.

Uruguay gets its 'revenge'

Arch nemesis Uruguay has wreaked its revenge against Australia for World Cup elimination, beating the Socceroos to a prestige friendly against England.

Australia had been negotiating with England about the possibility of a friendly match at the new Wembley Stadium in the lead-up to the World Cup.

However England has reportedly settled on Uruguay, Jamaica and a yet-to-be-determined Scandinavia team as its three warm-up friendlies.

The opposition were chosen for their similar playing styles to the three opponents England will face in group B of the World Cup: Paraguay, Trinidad & Tobago, and Sweden.

Co-incidentally, Uruguay and Jamaica were Australia's most recent vanquished opponents.

An England snub increased the likelihood of Australia playing South Korea in London as well as Holland in Rotterdam on June 4 as its main World Cup warm-ups.

South Korea and Holland are the two national teams most recently coached by current Australia coach Guus Hiddink.

Uruguay have hit back against the Roos

Mori relishing coaching role

By Joseph Sapienza

Although the promotion of Alan Vest to head coach came as no surprise to many, it was the appointment of the domestic game's most prolific scorer in history as Vest's right hand man that caught a few pundits off-guard.

Never before has Perth Glory had one of its coaching staff play for the team simultaneously, but times have changed, and Mori seems to fit the bill perfectly.

"It's an honour for me to be involved with the coaching staff," he said.

"I'm looking forward to it, it feels good, and it's another step for me and an opportunity to get involved in the top league."

"Coaching is obviously the next step for me and I enjoy it a lot."

Mori, 35, launched his coaching career with Adelaide City in the South Australian Premier League after the NSL wound up for good following the 2003/04 campaign, and it has yielded quick rewards for the man they call "Frogger."

In his first year as player/coach of Adelaide City in 2004, they finished 7th in the 12-team competition. This year was a different story as Mori guided his team to the Championship while also netting the Coach of the Year Award.

The Glory's new coaching staff of head manager Alan Vest (left) and assistant Damian Mori, who cannot wait for their new challenge

Mori said the learning never stops with coaching.

"I've now done almost two seasons (coaching). The first season I came back (to Adelaide) we probably just wanted to stabilize, we had a lot of young boys and we just wanted to survive and we did that."

"Then the following year (this year) we put a good pre-season in and we won the Championship so that was good."

"It teaches you something every day, I think something new comes up at every training session and every game and I think you can never stop learning with coaching."

From an outsiders perspective, coaching and playing must be a difficult task, but Mori says it is important to strike the right balance.

"I did a lot of (work) in training with preparation and I think come game time most players know what's expected of them and it's just a matter of going out and doing that. I had a very good captain at the club, he led very well at the back and I think that helps a lot as well."

Mori clearly knows what his role will be in the reshuffled coaching department and he can't wait to start working with an experienced coach in Vest.

"As an assistant you're more or less just a support person for the coach and I'll give Vesty everything that he needs and whatever he needs doing I'm there to help him," Mori said.

"Alan is a fantastic coach and for me, it's been a pleasure when I've worked with him over the last four years and a couple of years when we had the Glory zone team. I've just learnt so much from him.

"I'm just rapt that I've got another chance to work with him and to get an insight into how he thinks now (that he is) head coach."

"Alan may say some things that I'll have to take note of where before if he gave me a bit of advice it may have gone over the head."

"Obviously I'm going to have a say but at the end of the day Alan's the head coach and, as coach, you tend to have the direction you want to take and the assistant's there to give you feedback. My input will be what Alan really wants it to be if you know what I mean."

"Obviously I'd like to give my opinions but at the end of the day, Alan and I think very much the same in the way we set up our team and the way the team plays, so I don't think it's going to be a big deal where we're not going to be thinking pretty much on the same path."

With the inaugural Hyundai A-League finals series looming, Mori genuinely believes the Glory can make the top four.

"At the start of every season, every team wants to make the top four. Our goal (still) is to make the top four and it's important that the club is there. I'm sure that with the players we've got its achievable."

Mori doesn't believe he'll have any problems with teammates now that he's also an assistant, and he looks forward to working with the club's younger players.

Mori will continue to reside in Adelaide – as he has been doing since signing with the Glory – and will fly back to Perth for the games and meet the team at its destination for away fixtures. Vest recently hinted the current arrangements could be tinkered with slightly.

Mori will make his debut as an assistant coach in the city where he was born. That's against Melbourne Victory at Olympic Park on December 29.

Sydney desperate to hold onto Kazu

Sydney FC chief Tim Parker admits the club is desperate to hang onto Kazu Miura beyond the Club World Championships that finished last week.

Salary cap limits will prevent Sydney from keeping the Japanese legend, who has proven a revelation to the A-League in his four-match guest stint.

"I believe the guest player rule has to be changed," said Parker.

"We (the clubs) need to sit down with FFA and discuss the matter.

"At the moment the guest player has to be included in the salary cap and is only allowed to play four matches (in the A-League)." Parker also admitted Sydney's successful Club World Championship campaign has proved costly, with reward money being split with the rest of the A-League. He also told the Courier Mail: "We've incurred an awful lot of expenses. The Tahiti trip was very costly.

"There's no windfall. We've been playing for pride.

"But in terms of opening doors it has certainly had its benefits. "It's about the long term and we're on people's radars." Parker has held a number of meetings with J-League clubs.

Sydney FC want to continue it's deal with Kazu Miura

"We talked about playing exhibition matches. Essentially, we want to help each other. "The response has been very positive.

"Being on the world stage has been worth it in terms of forging links with Japan and it has done wonders for our profile but it has certainly been a costly exercise."

Meanwhile Sydney superstar Dwight Yorke has been speaking of his disappointment at the manner in which he left the Premier League but the former Manchester United striker admits he is now playing with "big smile" on his face.

"I went to Birmingham, got messed around, and thought, 'I deserve better than this.' "The players who were playing instead of me weren't particularly better than I am. They are not at Birmingham now so that proves something. I don't mind leaving England, but the way I did wasn't nice.

"Even though the Middle East was a greater option in terms of pay, I felt Sydney was something new, something refreshing. I just had enough of England for a while. I needed a change.

"People thought I left the Premiership to come out to Sydney just to enjoy the way of life - which is part of it - but I enjoy my football.

"It's beautiful in Sydney. I have a fantastic apartment in Darling harbour, bang centre of the City, with a view of Sydney Harbour.

"I have a big smile on my face again. I hadn't had that for a couple of years. With Trinidad qualifying (for the World Cup) I have an even bigger smile."

> "It's beautiful in Sydney. I have a fantastic apartment in Darling harbour, bang centre of the City, with a view of Sydney Harbour
> – *Dwight Yorke*

Reinaldo begins training

Queensland Roar signing Reinaldo will began training with the club this week kick starting his Australian career.

The 21 year-old Brazilian striker was signed sight unseen by coach Miron Bleiberg, but could play from the start against Adelaide United when the A-League resumes after it's summer recess.

Bleiberg told the *Courier Mail*: "One thing I can guarantee is that we will be giving it everything in our last six games and all our opponents will know they've been playing a good team.

"If we don't make it to the finals ourselves, we will certainly have a say in who does.

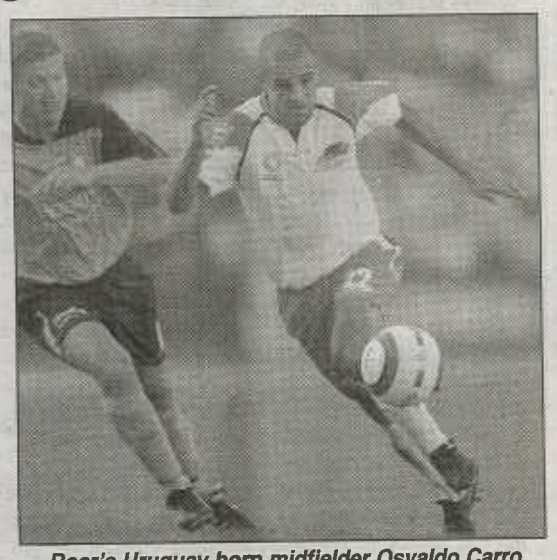
"We don't want to play our remaining games thinking about finals. It's important that the team tries to play without that type of pressure and relaxes enough to produce our best football. I just want our players to focus on their own performances and play to the best of their ability."

The Roar have lacked that killer punch up front with Alex Brosque shining out as their top scorer with 3 to his name.

Queensland have only managed to notch up 14 goals this year, a statitsic which puts them second last from the eight A-League clubs and four more then cellar dwellers the New Zealand Knights.

Reinaldo (the name says it all) could well be what the Roar were looking for as goals need to surge for Bleiberg's side if they have any chance of making the final four.

The club's attacking play has already suited Reinaldo's style so the combination could become rather lethal, or at least the Roar hope so.



Roar's Uruguay born midfielder Osvaldo Carro (pictured) will be joined by Brazilian Reinaldo for the final six A-League matches

The Brazilian has had experience in Holland and also in his homeland and will be out from game one to impress his coach and fellow players.

Reinaldo becomes the club's second South American signing, the other being Osvaldo Carro from Uruguay.

Jets want Johnson

Negotiations kick-start for midfielder

Newcastle Jets manager Richard Money is confident his club will be able to strike a new deal with Richard Johnson that will see the midfielder stay with the club for a further season.

Negotiations have stalled over an agreement to a new fee, with the Jets' manoeuvrability within the Hyundai A-League's salary cap unknown with Football Federation Australia is yet to determine the cap limit for next season.

"Firstly, I would like to say that Richard Johnson is an integral part of the make up of the Newcastle Jets, and I would very much like Richard to stay with the club next season," Money said.

"The negotiations regarding short term contracts are normal at this time of the season.

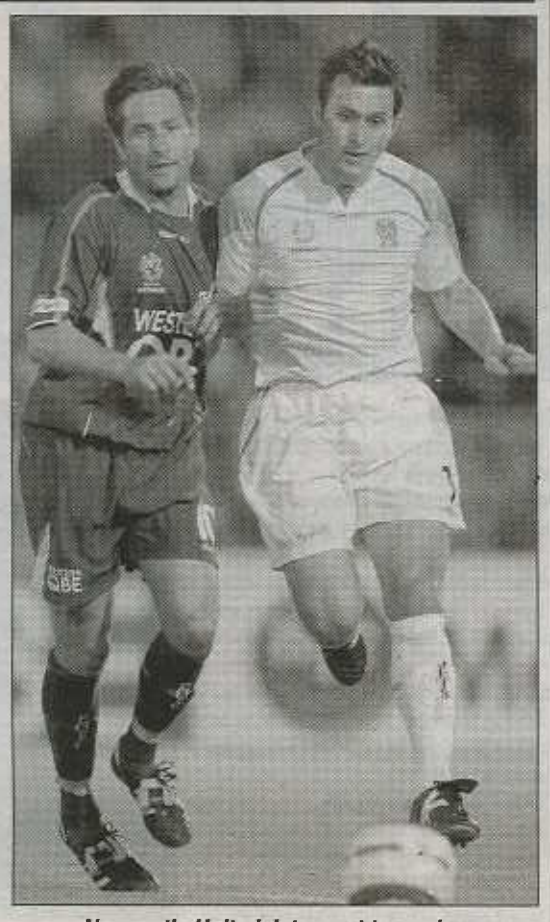
"Sometimes negotiations are easy and straight forward and other times they (contracts) can be difficult but that's football. I am confident and I know Johnno well enough to say that we will continue to talk and strive to reach a compromise so that we can focus on the games ahead and beyond," he said.

Johnson has indicated that he wants to stay with the club and hopes the negotiations will be completed soon.

"I would love to stay with the Jets because I love the club and I have been very happy at the club. I think we really have the right players and the right formula for success but negotiations regarding my contract are basically the same as they were three weeks ago," he said.

"There are a few ongoing things that have to be sorted out between myself and the club but it's not the end of the communication lines, discussions are ongoing I am hopeful that we can reach agreement and I would love for things to work out for both parties."

Johnson has been one of the Jets' most consistent players so far this season, his influence in the side's midfield has been priceless so his signing would come as an added bonus for the Newcastle club.



Newcastle United Jets want to re-sign Richard Johnson (right)

Pele puts Japan ahead of Roos

Brazilian superstar Pele has suggested that Japan will progress ahead of Australia from Group F at next year's World Cup in Germany.

Pele believes Japan - under the coaching of fellow Brazil legend Zico - can make a better fist of it at next year's finals than they did at home four years ago.

Under Philippe Troussier at the 2002 World Cup, Japan made it to the second round.

Co-host South Korea, under present Australia coach Guus Hiddink, went as far as the semi-finals.

"But this time I expect the roles to be reversed and for Japan to go a step further," Pele wrote in the Japanese daily Yomiuri Shimbun.

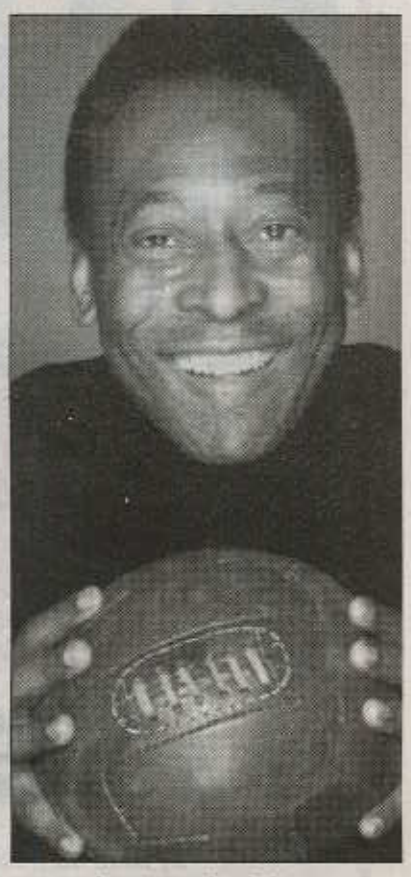
"Zico is an experienced trainer who knows all about playing World Cups from his days doing just that for Brazil," said Pele, 65.

Japan and Australia have also been grouped with five-time world champion Brazil, and Croatia.

After a week of stating that Brazil should be fearing the Aussies, his remarks have confused a few Roo fans with his tip on Japan to do the job in their group.

Sportstab odds have put out that the Socceroos are 61-1 to win the World Cup, 51-1 to finish runner-up, 21-1 to get into the final four, 9-1 to reach the Quarter-Finals, 3.75-1 to get passed the opening group stages.

Champions Brazil are $3.25 in taking out the World Cup and have been seen as firm favourites with all the bookies from not only Australia, but the rest of the world.



Brazilian Legend Pele has tipped Japan to out-do Australia in next year's World Cup

Exclusive Interview:

John Hutchinson

As recently as five rounds ago, country Victorian attacker John Hutchinson was rarely featured in the Mariners starting eleven.

Fast forward those five rounds and Hutchinson is now the third highest goal scorer in the Mariners lineup, having netted four times since assuming the role alongside Stewart Petrie in the Central Coast frontline.

Renowned as the joker in Lawrie McKinna's lineup, Hutchinson has demonstrated the form that made him one of the hottest properties in the old National Soccer League since being welcomed back to the Mariners lineup and is hoping to add to his burgeoning tally of strikes as the inaugural Hyundai A-League draws to a close.

ccmariners.com.au caught up with one of the crowd favourites from Central Coast Stadium as the Mariners arrived back on the training paddock ahead of their highly anticipated New Years Eve match up with the Newcastle United Jets.

Before your current run in the starting lineup, you've been in and out of the side, does if feel good to have come back so emphatically?

I think I needed to. I did get dropped from the side for maybe not performing like I should be, I got told that by Wayne O'Sullivan and Lawrie McKinna, both told me that I needed to lift my game. So when I got the chance I needed to do something and I'm glad that I've been able to score goals, I just wish we'd won a few more games where I've scored, but we haven't been able to, though it's been good playing and scoring.

How frustrating was your spell on the sidelines?

It is frustrating, but you've got a squad of twenty and they're all good players. Any one out of our twenty boys can play, so when you get your chance you've got to take it and I probably didn't take it the first couple of times, now I've come in and hopefully I've taken my chance and I can't get dropped. It's up to the gaffa now, if I get dropped or I don't get dropped, I'll wait and see what happens.

Throughout it all, you've been described as the joker of the team, is that how you see yourself?

I just see myself as part of the team. I like joking around and mucking around, I guess that comes from coming from the country, I'm a bit more laid back, but I do like having a joke, but when it's time to work I do work and I take it very seriously, but joking and mucking around I'm definitely up for that anytime.

Heading into the Christmas break, the Mariners have the second best attacking record of any team, despite being with the likes of Nick Mrdja and Tom Pondeljak for most of the season, what do you put this down to?

Those two boys out have affected the team in an attacking way, but we have stepped up and whoever has been playing has been doing a great job, the boys coming off the bench have been really good. Our aim now is to make the top four and get as high as we can get in the ladder. We're still aiming for the top two, it's getting further and further out of our reach, but we're still aiming for it and we won't stop aiming for it until it's mathematically out of our reach. Tommy's back now, so it gives the gaffa a head ache who he's going to choose, but I'm just going to put myself out there and hopefully get a spot.

The next Mariners outing is at home to the Newcastle United Jets on New Years Eve, is this shaping to be one of the biggest games of the year?

I've spoken to a few of the locals and they're saying that they don't care if we lose every other game, just don't lose against the Jets. I knew it was pretty big here, the rivalry, but you don't understand from a supporters point of view how big it is, so it makes the game bigger for us. It is like a Grand Final for us, if we lose this game than the top four gets further away from us, if we win the game we'll probably jump in to the top four. We do need to get three points and we're playing at home, our home form hasn't been the best but hopefully we can turn it around and get off to a good start in the New Year.

The Jets are the only side in the Hyundai A-League the Mariners are yet to beat over 90 minutes, are you confident of a positive result this time?

People say that, but if you look at it like that you'll probably get scared of them, but we don't look at it like that. We were 2-0 up against Perth and we kinda chucked that, we can score goals we just have to work on our defensive game, it's not just the defenders, and that, we need to defend as a unit.

Looking past the Jets game, can you see the Mariners making the top four?

I can, I definitely can. I think most of the boys think we can as well, if I didn't think we could I wouldn't be here anymore. We've got a good team and we've got good team spirit, we've got a good coaching staff and we are working hard at it. Most teams are still on holidays now, but we've been back in training the last couple of days, we're definitely working hard at it.

Finally, how good is it to be apart of this positive era of Australian football?

It's great, I wouldn't want to be doing anything else. I've done the part time situation and the working situation where you work all day and then try to go play football and your football takes a toll on you. Now I'm playing the best possible football you can play in, playing professionally and with the Hyundai A-League doing so well and the Socceroos qualifying, it's unbelievable. That's the only thing I want to do now, be apart of the Hyundai A-League and be a part of the success.

Central Coast Mariners' nippy attacker John Hutchinson

A-LEAGUE RE

Mid-season break he

HYUNDAI A-LEAGUE

By Mark Stavroulakis

Now with the mid-season break in full swing, a much needed breather has seen teams take the time out in looking back at the first fifteen matches of the first ever A-League competition in this nation.

The round ball game has started off with a huge bang with fans flocking to see their newfound teams from across Australia and New Zealand.

Sure, some teams have done better than others but overall the standard of football has been pretty good.

Much to the amazement of all, Adelaide United have set the pace as league leaders of the A-League with 32 points, five points clear of glamour boys Sydney FC while the Newcastle Jets and Perth Glory make up the top four.

On the other side of the ladder, the hapless New Zealand Knights cannot seem to compete with the rest of the league as they are a massive 14 points adrift of the next side being the Queensland Roar.

So how have your teams faired so far this season?

Below is an evaluation on how the sides have gone after 15 rounds

(1) ADELAIDE UNITED

(10 wins – 2 Draws – 3 Losses – For 23 – Against 18 – Points 32)

Top Scorer – Carl Veart 5 goals

Story so far: Adelaide United has been a complete success story so far in this years A-League competition.

John Kosmina has pumped his chargers up from the first whistle and it has been their consistent form that has seen them edge five points clear of the top of the A-League.

Not given a chance to even finish in the top four at the start of the season, the Reds have proved the theory that hard work and patience pays off.

The people of South Australia have been delighted with the club's success even though they've found it tough to win at home, Kosmina's boys have been one of the best away sides in the land.

One incident that sparked a melee amongst the league fraternity was that of their match against the QLD Roar.

Kossie and Roar coach Miron Bleiberg had it out verbally in what was one of the stories of the season as it hit the headlines in all major T.V. and newspaper outlets.

Many can't wait for the return match on the 1st of January 2006.

An inspiration to the side has been that of the efforts of skipper Michael Valkanis.

He has really pulled the squad together and has easily become one of the league's best defenders.

Let's not forget the strike force of Shenquing Qu and Fernando Rech also Carl Veart's goals and defensive midfielder Angelo Costanzo have been standouts.

Costanzo in particular has been in terrific form and will certainly be amongst the team of the year awards come March with his feats in the middle of the park.

Standout Player: Surely the defensive efforts of Michael Valkanis has seen him rise amongst the best players in the league.

His never-say-die attitude along with his ability to score goals has made Valkanis one of the finest A-League stars and with six games remaining, will be an important figure come finals time.

Outcome: The way the Reds are going it looks like Kosmina will be celebrating a Minor Premiership and good on him, he has thoroughly deserved it so far, don't be surprised if he picks up the Coach of the Year award also.

ABSW COMMENT: Reds to march onto glory

(2) SYDNEY FC

(8 wins – 3 Draws – 4 Losses – For 27 – Against 21 – Points 27)

Top Scorer – Sasho Petrovski 6 goals

Story so far: Much more was expected from the favourites to take out the league this year but Pierre Littbarski's squad have shown that they are also human.

Bookies have had them as the hot tip to take out the championship this year but have been ousted by a more consistent Adelaide United outfit.

Entertainment wise you can't fault Sydney.

Dwight Yorke, Australia's best overseas player to date has been magnificent. You can tell that Yorkie has not come here for a holiday and his leadership will surely be needed in the run towards the finals.

Goal poacher Sasho Petrovski has also fitted into the squad nicely and has been amongst the goals for the side.

His value on and off the pitch has been priceless for Pierre's squad.

You can't count out keeper and someone that should be considered into Guus Hiddink's Socceroos squad Clint Bolton.

'Bolts' has been on absolute fire and has been one of the main reasons why the side has kept a number of positive clean sheets.

One player that has shot out of nowhere has been that of Young Socceroos defender Jacob Timpano.

The lad with the curly locks has really been one of the finds of the season so far after taking up his chance of playing first team football via the injury of former club captain Mark Rudan.

On a commercial sense Sydney has been the number one side.

The signing of Japanese sensation Kazu Miura only lifted the club's profile further but the club is hoping that if they can play the same way they did in their last home match against the Victory, then first spot is possible.

Stand-out Player: He will be leading Trinidad & Tobago to it's first ever World Cup in Germany next year as skipper, but his duties here in Australia have been class all the way.

Dwight Yorke has been as solid as a rock and has led from the midfield to attack but most importantly, has carried on with his super-star status as being what he is – a true star.

Outcome: Sydney will be hoping that a shock 5-0 loss to the Victory early in the season will not be repeated as the side hopes to hit top form with their final six matches of the year.

Littbarski believes that his side has what it takes to win the league but at the moment will need to throw caution to the wind in consolidating a top 4 spot.

ABSW COMMENT: Sydney stable to latch onto finals spot

(3) NEWCASTLE JETS

(7 wins – 3 Draws – 5 Losses – For 21 – Against 17 – Points 24)

Top Scorer – Ante Milicic 6 goals

Sydney FC's star striker Dwight Yorke has been in terrific form while Adelaide United's Michael Valkanis (left) has led as the Reds in the club's back-line

Story so far: Who said the Newcastle Jets can't play football?

After a sluggish start to the season the Newcastle Jets have entered as this season's dark-horses coming into the finals race. The club has done brilliantly, especially away from home in pulling off amazing results that has seen them link into the top four of the competition.

Financial worries have gripped the club in the closing stages of their season prior to the mid-year break so the club is hoping that their players can continue their motivation and momentum till the end of the season.

Star striker Ante Milicic and clever playmaker Nicky Carle have been a real handful for opposing sides.

The tenacious attitude in midfield of Richard Johnson along with the new talents of defensive star and former concreter Allan Picken has seen a rise in personnel at EnergyAustralia Stadium.

Club captain Ned Zelic has been quite average this season as many fans expect a bigger and better second half while you can't rule out Uruguay born Mateo Corbo who has been lively as Boeing 747 jumbo jet with his tough tackles and his hard-man image.

Standout Player: Nicky Carle has been what this league has been looking for. Flair and his ability to beat an opponent at any time has really seen the skilful star rise amongst one of the finest talents in this year's competition.

Outcome: As stated before, hopefully their bonuses are heeded towards their players and their minds stay focused on the job at hand – saying that, Newcastle will be singing towards a finals birth.

ABSW COMMENT: Jets to fly into the top 4

(4) PERTH GLORY

(6 wins – 4 Draws – 5 Losse
Points 22)

Top Scorer – Bobby Despotov

Story so far: Why oh why woul
six games to go even though he's
the top 4?

Englishman Steve McMahon ha
he even knew it wasn't going to b

Alan Vest and striker Damian M
nonetheless and will need to sho
ness.

The former NSL champs have

One week they've been seen a
league the next, a spot alongside
the ladder.

It's been a mixture of results fo
and you can tell by seeing their
back on the side so far this year.

Veteran striker and current jo
Bobby Despotovski has rallied i
seven goals alongside his partner
n't been many players that have i

Young Socceroo midfielder Ni
short of outstanding and certainly
does Billy Celeski who has worke

The club was thrown into chaos
break, hopefully the time off has
and composing themselves towar

Much more is needed by club
Simon Colosimo who haven't ha

PORT CARD

ralds exciting finish

For 23 – Against 19 –

7 goals

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n able to steer them into

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early as it was.
have been handed the job
hat the Glory mean busi-

n in all sorts.
ossible champions of this
Knights at the bottom of

e Western Australian side
hful supporters turn their

top-scorer of the league
or the Glory's cause with
crime Mori but there has-
ressed so far.
y Ward has been nothing
as a future in the game as
hard so far.
the end of the mid-season
n players cool their heads
a grand slam finish.
ptain Jamie Harnwell and
he best of seasons but rest

assured, will be giving their all for the Glory cause.

Standout Player: In my opinion it would have to be Nicky Ward.

The youngster has shown maturity beyond his age and is quickly becoming one of the A-League's rising stars.

Hopefully Australia, and Perth Glory can keep Ward for a few more years.

Outcome: With their off field dramas now out of the way through the loss of McMahon, the boys can now concentrate on getting the job done with an easier frame of mind.

Consistency is needed for Perth to finish in the top four but somehow, it doesn't look all that bright in W.A.

ABSW COMMENT: Glory to bounce out of the finals series

(5) CENTRAL COAST MARINERS

(5 wins – 5 Draws – 5 Losses – For 23 – Against 22 – Points 20)

Top Scorer – Stewart Petrie 7 goals

Story so far: It's make or break time for the Central Coast Mariners as they prepare an assault on the league in its final phase of the competition.

Seen as one of the first side's to have grabbed a top 4 spot before the start of the league, the Mariners have been hardest hit with injuries that has crippled the squad and Lawrie McKinna's plans.

Even assistant coach Ian Ferguson was drafted into the squad which has shown just how much damage the side has gone through.

The new-year will herald a new beginning for the side and with almost all of their stars returning back from injury in Paul O'Grady and of course Tommy Pondeljak, one must think that they have a chance in sneaking into the top 4.

The loss of Nicky Mrdja for the whole season was a real back burner for the club but the goals haven't dried up at Gosford as Scotsman Stewart Petrie has shown that age will not weary him with seven to his name.

You can't cancel out their now found striker in John Hutchinson who has bagged four while you can throw the utility tag off Dean Heffernan's head as he has managed to score 5 for the year.

Michael Beauchamp has really pushed his claims for a Socceroos spot in Germany next year with some fine performances, while stand-in keeper Danny Vukovic has really shone bright since the injury to John Crawley that will see him miss the remainder of the year.

As bad as the weather has been for the Mariners at home, as has their performances in front of their faithful Marinators.

Again one of the few sides that have been up and down.

Standout Player: Dean Heffernan has really stamped his claim as being an A-League player.

Many critics believed that 'Heffo' was simply a Premier League player but boy has he proven many people wrong with his performances for the Mariners.

Goals have also come the midfielder's way and no doubt will figure as a prominent player come end of the season.

Outcome: I believe that the Mariners will come good and will be one of the shock's to enter the top 4, especially with their returning stars.

ABSW COMMENT: Mariners to march into 4!

(6) MELBOURNE VICTORY

(5 wins – 4 Draws – 6 Losses – For 20 – Against 16 – Points 19)

Top Scorer – Archie Thompson 6 goals

Story so far: Melbourne has played some of the best football this country has seen under the leadership of Ernie Merrick via its free flowing passing play but the points have failed to appear on the board.

Known as the youngest team in the competition, a recent run of poor results towards the end of the first round saw Merrick's side tumble out of the finals race.

Its going to be a tough six remaining matches for Merrick as he is set to lose inspirational skipper Kevin Muscat to a 3-week suspension, so a lot will be expected from hopeful Socceroo Archie Thompson and his goals.

Adrian Leijer has been in fine form in Victory's back-line but it's been the pace of Richard Kitzbichler that has been an eye-opener for the rest of the league fraternity.

Injuries, suspensions and Thompson's Aussie call have thrown Melbourne into disarray thus their failure to land down a consistent run of form.

Although praised for his hard work ethic up front, Daniel Allsopp's poor finishing in front of goals has let the side down a tad or two.

Amidst reports that the Scotsman coach will be shown the door if he fails to reach the top 4 at the end of the year, Merrick still has 2-years left on his contract which he will honour as he has the backing of the board and its hierarchy.

Nevertheless, it's going to be tough to see the Victory reach the finals but maybe their fortunes are set to change, especially in front of goal in the last part of the year.

Standout Player: One of the players that has failed to gain the recognition that he has thoroughly deserved has been that of defensive midfielder Steve Pantelidis.

On paper, he has been one of the very few players that has taken part in almost all of Melbourne's matches, why you ask? Simple, his ability to break down opposition play, sure he has claimed the tag of being one of the roughest players in the league due to his constant fouling but it's been that tactic that has seen him rise as one of the Victory's best.

Outcome: Without the leadership skills of Muscat for 3 games, the Victory do have their backs against the wall as Muscat is worth 1000 players on the pitch.

Merrick will call upon all his youngsters in Piorkowski, Kristian Sarkies, Vince Lia and Carl Recchia in stepping up a notch or two.

ABSW COMMENT: Victory to battle till the end

(7) QUEENSLAND ROAR

(4 wins – 6 Draws – 5 Losses – For 14 – Against 14 – Points 18

Top Scorer – Alex Brosque 3 goals

Story so far: Known as Australia's answer to Chelsea's Jose Mourniho (or so he thinks) Roar coach Miron Bleiberg has had an indifferent start to the season.

His ability to steer his side as one of the best attacking teams in the land has earned him a lot of respect from fellow A-League spectators and officials but unfortunately, it's been their lack of fire up front that has seen the Roar tumble out of the four.

Alex Brosque has tried his heart out in doing the job for the Queenslander's but a side can't be built up of one known scorer.

A lot of credit has to be given to the club's defence as they have been unbelievable.

Skipper Chad Gibson and big Swiss defender Remo Buess have been great as has the midfield services of Matty McKay and Massimo Murdocca.

A player that should be signalled out on his own for the Roar has been that of keeper Tom Willis.

The kid is brilliant – it's a must that fans watch him now that we have him here in Australia as only time will tell until he disappears overseas.

Their 1-1 draw against the lowly New Zealand Knights really summed up the club's year so far.

Bleiberg however believes that his side can make the four and plans to make a few changes to his squad in order of getting the results needed to get that coveted position.

Reinaldo Elias De Costa is the man and name that will hopefully get the Roar there.

Miron signed the Brazilian striker till the remainder of the season and could prove a fruitful partnership alongside Brosque.

On and off attacker Jonti Richter has also been a lively signing to date, but his failure to score goals has seen him run in and out of the squad.

Standout Player: Goalkeeper Tom Willis without a shadow of doubt has been Queensland's best.

A natural keeper, the Italian look-a-like custodian could be a hero if he continues his fine performances for the Roar.

Outcome: A last run of hope will see the Roar just miss out on a top four finishing but I believe the squad has the makings of a team for the future.

A number of outstanding youngsters accompanied with a few experienced heads have seen this team rise as one to look out for next year and beyond.

ABSW COMMENT: No roaring in the top 4

(8) NEW ZEALAND KNIGHTS

(1 wins – 1 Draws – 13 Losses – For 10 – Against 34 – Points 4

Top Scorer – Simon Yeo 4 goals

Story so far: Can somebody please tell me why the Knights are still in the league? Harsh comment I know but the side has been somewhat of a disaster for the A-League.

On and off the pitch the club has been all over the shop.

Coach John Adshead admitted that the club's recruitment policy was poorly done and that massive changes will be seen next year but isn't that a bit too late.

The club has picked up 4 points in 15 matches and their only victory came against the Mariners earlier in the year.

There's been a clash of heads between the club's coaching management and skipper Danny Hay who has so far refused to get back into training after a fall-out with Adshead and co.

Also, the news that their top striker in Simon Yeo is leaving in January for the U.K. really asks the question, what will the Knights offer for the last six matches?

Kris Bright will take over Yeo's spot but the Knights will miss Simon's eye for goal as will partner Sean Devine.

One bright aspect will be that they will be playing for pride and with no pressure, which could possibly out-do a hopeful top four aspirant.

The side did do well in their last fixture against the Roar where they picked up a precious point so if they can carry that onto the final six matches, we could see a new side all together.

Keeper Danny Milosevic has been the saviour for the Kiwis as without him, cricket scores could have easily hit the headlines.

Sydneysider Zenon Caravella and Yeo along with rising Kiwi star Jeremy Brockie have been signalled out as the Knights best players so far.

It's unfortunate that the Knights have failed to make an impact in the A-League thus far, FFA CEO John O'Neill has backed them for the new year but the club is hoping that more success will be seen on the pitch in winning back some fans.

Standout Player: Kept busy for obvious reasons, keeper Danny Milosevic has really been a hero for the Knights.

Being bombarded with a number of shots at his goal time and time again, it's been his sheer brilliance under the sticks that has saved the Knights from total embarrassment.

Outcome: If the Knights pick up a point or two that would be a great achievement for the club.

Nothing else really sticks out, their season is well and truly over, and the internal fight between Hay and Adshead is on going.

Hopefully this is resolved for the start of next season where *ABSW* hopes the Knights will put it in a better performance.

ABSW COMMENT: Sinking Knights can't wait for the year to end

African success in Sydney

One of Africa's finest stars - Jay Jay Okocha was admired at the recent African-Australian Soccer Cup

The sounds of African drums rang out on Saturday 10 December as Sierra Leone and Guinea went head to head in the grand final of the 2005 African-Australian Soccer Cup.

The day of colour, sport, music and dance provided the perfect backdrop for an event which also used the world game to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS in the Australian community.

According to Dr Serrie Kamara, Chairperson of the African-Australian Youth Social Club, "The tournament, which brings together twelve African nations, provides a platform for the players to support the millions of people affected by HIV/AIDS in their homeland."

"Many of the players are from refugee backgrounds, so the tournament is also about building a stronger sense of community for African-Australians," he said.

With the theme, ***Play it Safe and Give HIV/AIDS a Red Card,*** the players also participated in a photoshoot for a calendar which features each of the teams, which also represent Nigeria, Ghana, Tanzania, Chad, Egypt, Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Liberia, Sudan and Zimbabwe.

"Soccer is the world game and HIV/AIDS is a world problem," said Mr Tadgh McMahon, Manager of the Multicultural HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C Service who has joined forces with the community for the event. "Soccer is a great way to bring this global health problem to the local level for young Australians."

More than 40 million people are living with HIV/AIDS around the world, including 2.2 million children.

And for the record after a memorable day, Sierra Leone won the finals 2-1, while Sudan beat Ghana 2-1 in the third place play-off.

Former Socceroos honour fallen Policeman

It was an emotional but fun day on Saturday December 10th in Knox, as the self styled 'Copperoos' took on an ex-Socceroos team comprising the likes of Gary Cole, Jimmy Rooney, Peter Blasby, Alan Davidson, Andrew Marth, Mehmet Durakovic, Warren Spink, Ernie Tapai, Kenny Murphy, Joe Biscic, Eddie Krncevic and Jimmy Campbell.

The Victoria Police Soccer Club (VPSC) set up the match to commemorate Senior Constable Tony Clarke, whose life was tragically cut short when he was murdered whilst doing his duty in April this year.

In his honour: Fallen Senior Constable Tony Clarke in a recent photo with his wife, Tina, and 16-month-old son, Connor.

A crowd of around 500 turned out for the match that was won 6-3 by the former Socceroos side. With much of Victoria's finest on hand, many joked that it was the best behaved football crowd in a long time.

Australian football Hall of Fame member and former World Cup referee Chris Bambridge turned back the clock as he took control of the fixture. "It was a great day," said Bambridge. "Jimmy Rooney hasn't lost a bit and Fausto De Amicis was booked for simulation in the penalty area but still managed to be awarded best on ground," said Bambridge with a smile.

The fallen Police officers wife and son, Tina and Connor Clarke were flown in to the ground by the Police Airwing helicopter just prior to the match and enjoyed the day.

Brisbane Waters the place to be on New Years Eve

Gosford City Council, in association with the Central Coast Mariners, announced off field plans for the Mariners' New Years Eve clash against the Newcastle United Jets at Central Coast Stadium.

Fireworks, street theatre, live music, amusement rides and kids interactive activities are among the attractions on offer at Gosford's social hub, which will immediately follow the Mariners' crucial Round 16 Hyundai A-League clash against their local rivals.

"Gosford is the place to be on the Central Coast on New Years Eve," said Mariners Executive Chairman Lyall Gorman.

"Our clash with the Jets at Central Coast Stadium is arguably the most important of our season and we felt it necessary to match that off the field.

"The Brisbane Water foreshore is an iconic Central Coast area and there will be something there on New Years Eve for the whole family – fireworks, music, rides and, hopefully, three points!"

The east coast encounter between the Mariners and the Jets has established itself as the paramount derby fixture in the Hyundai A-League.

In three matches since early May's Club World Championship qualifiers, honours have shared between the two sides, with the Jets' 1-0 win at EnergyAustralia Stadium in October complementing a 1-1 draw and Mariners penalty shootout win in previous meetings.

Lyall Gorman & Laurie Maher being interviewed by media

Coming into the New Years Eve match, the Mariners sit four points below the Jets and two points away from a spot in the Hyundai A-League top four.

"It'll be a cracker, there's no doubt," said Gorman, in reference to the derby on December 31.

"There have been some fantastic matches already played between the two clubs and this clash is only going to be bigger and better given what is at stake, I can't wait!"

Gorman also paid tribute to a host of local organisations; Gosford City Council, the Central Coast Leagues Club and Wyong Councilor Brenton Pavier through Pavier Amusements, who each have contributed significantly to help make the New Years Eve event possible.

The Mariners take on northern rivals the Newcastle United Jets at Central Coast Stadium to write another page in the history of the east coast derby on New Years Eve.

Its the only known 'derby' match in the A-League.

Jets manager Richard Money shouts the orders at training.

Littbarski: Carney could be anything!

Sydney FC coach Pierre Littbarski says star winger David Carney can gate-crash Australia's World Cup squad.

"Absolutely, absolutely outstanding," was how Littbarski rated Carney's performance in the club world championship game against Deportivo Saprissa.

"He's going in the direction what I want, yet maybe we don't know how good he can be," Littbarski said.

"He proved he can stand up on this stage and match it with a team that had so many [Costa Rican] internationals in their side.

"He was fantastic in the first half, his movement [in particular] and he did some good things in the second half. If he continues to produce this sort of form at a high level then anything is possible."

Carney waved away the praise, admitting he was still down after the Saprissa defeat.

He told the *Daily Telegraph*: "I thought I was all right in patches. Sometimes I thought I could have done better in situations.

"I think it would have been good if we had scored off one of them.

"I guess I did prove something to myself.

"Saprissa are a good side but, just not personally, I thought the whole team [Sydney] did step up.

"I am not one to be afraid of big occasions. I want to be out there and prove a point that I can do it but I thought I did OK.

"It was frustrating not getting a goal. The game was so tight that if we'd have scored in the first half we could have sat back like Saprissa had done but it went the other way.

"With Alvin [Ceccoli] being sent off and Sasho [Petrovski] going off it didn't help much.

"But full credit to the lads. We kept going and going. We've got to hold hour heads up high because we did our best."

Carney is amongst a swag of A-League players hoping to catch the eye of Socceroos coac Guus Hiddink as he plans to enter his 30-man squad for the World Cup in Germany next June.

Sydney's talented midfielder: David Carney (left)

His venture back home from the U.K. and Scotland has paid rich divdends for Evertonian who has been in sterling form for Sydney in the A-League this season.

Don't count out a move back to Europe in forthcoming seasons from the live-wire midfielder.

NEW TRAINING FACILITIES FOR JETS

After months of negotiations with the local council and NBN State League entity Adamstown Rosebuds, the Newcastle Jets have moved to Adamstown Oval for all future training sessions.

The field of play has undergone a major redevelopment with increased maintenance of which will be ongoing to ensure that the facilities remain in good shape for the Jets preparations ahead of the remaining Hyundai A-League fixtures.

The new facilities has been given the thumbs up by the players, coaching staff and administration and is also a better centralized location for media accessibility and the player's residential geographic location.

Coach Richard Money is overwhelmed with the much improved facilities after holding his first player's meeting on Monday morning.

SANTA BUT NO SNOW FOR BIG SWISS

REMO BUESS (right): Qld Roar's lanky defender.

By Neil Favager

QUEENSLAND Roar defender, Remo Buess, has had to cope with some major cultural differences this year since his move to the Sunshine State from his native Switzerland.

More so than at any other time of the year, it is the Christmas period that tends to highlight those differences.

The weather is of course the most obvious disparity, but each country has its own traditions when it comes to celebrating the festive season and those ways become engraved on the brain. Deviations from what you are used can detract from the sense of Christmas until the new ways become the norm, and for Buess this is the case as he experiences his first Aussie Yuletide.

"At the moment it doesn't feel like Christmas for me because it is simply too warm. I'm used to it snowing at this time of year with a temperature of minus ten degrees. Usually I will sit in my room and watch the snowflakes drift past the window and everything is white, so it is hard to accept that it is actually Christmas time because this is so new to me."

"In Switzerland everybody decorates the outside of their house with lights and things but I haven't seen too much of that where I live yet," Buess said.

Unlike back home, the Hyundai A-League kicks back into action on the weekend after Christmas so the Roar squad are already back into full swing in preparation for the New Year's Day clash with table-topping Adelaide United.

"The Swiss league goes into recess over Christmas and doesn't restart until the end of January or early February, so normally all the Swiss players go home and spend time with their families."

"We would normally have a big family get-together for Christmas and go skiing or something. Quite often though a lot of players in the Swiss league have a clause (excuse the pun) in their contract that says they are not allowed to go skiing during the break in case they get injured," he laughed.

In northern Europe traditions are somewhat different to those in the southern hemisphere and most of the gift-giving and celebrations take place on a dark and wintry Christmas Eve.

"The 24th of December is generally the day when we exchange our gifts. We would have a big meal and everybody would be there - all our family and friends, etc. My mother would cook for days in preparation for it and I wouldn't get to even talk to her because she was so busy!"

So for his first Christmas on these shores will Buess and his Roar house-mates go all out?

"Because we have a game on January 1st we can't have a party or anything because we have to be in good shape for what is an important match for us. I'm sure we will do something at the house because we have myself, Chad, Massimo and Spase all living in the same place and none of us will be with our families."

Big Swiss says it's Roar skipper Chad Gibson who seems the most excited about the festive season.

"Chad is the one who is into Christmas the most. I'm sure he will organise something for us and I know that he loves this time of year."

A lover of quality family time, Gibson confirmed his fondness for the season.

"I brought the subject of Christmas up the other week and the other boys in the house were a bit blas_ about it. I just think it's a special time of year and I'll miss having the big family day that I'm used to. I enjoy the family side of things and really it's a time when no matter what type of year you've had Christmas is always a time for smiles and happiness. Everyone just seems to be in a better mood and I'm sure that's the same across the world," Gibson said.

As a way of initiating his Swiss team-mate into the Aussie way, the Roar captain says he will look to the ocean to provide their Christmas fare. "I'm going to buy a whole heap of seafood and try to recreate what it's like at home. We would always have loads of people around and plenty of food to feast on."

"I guess the four of us will just relax, have a good laugh and look forward to the New Year which will hopefully be a fresh start for us and the rest of the team. 2006 is going to be an important year for us and if we can go to Adelaide and get a result it will be the best possible start to a massive year for Queensland Roar and Australian football."

VALE

BILL HUME

Bill Hume who played two matches for Australia in the 1950s passed away on the 10th of December in New Zealand.

Bill had the rare distinction of playing for both New Zealand and Australia within the space of 12 months.

Born in the United Kingdom, Bill played two matches for Australia in 1959 (both against Scottish club Heart of Midlothian) in Sydney and Melbourne, scoring in the Melbourne match.

Bill had previously played for New Zealand against Australia in 1958 and came to Australia in 1959 playing in Sydney with firstly Gladesville-Ryde, and later Hakoah.

He returned to New Zealand in the early 1960's playing out his career with club side Hamilton Wanderers.

The funeral was held last Wednesday.

May he rest in heavenly peace.

***ABSW* wishes to send its condolences to the Hume family**

Inaugural Mariners fans day a smash hit

Over one thousand Central Coast Mariners supporters attended the inaugural Mariners fans day at Mingara Recreation Club two Saturday's ago, meeting the Mariners squad in typically brazen Central Coast sunshine.

With six matches remaining in the opening season of the Hyundai A-League, the large turnout of fans was heartening for the Mariners, who begin their campaign for a top four spot on New Years Eve against the Newcastle United Jets.

More than seven hundred dollars was raised for the Central Coast Community Chest throughout the day, including a significant contribution from the Cove, Sydney FC's supporter group.

The Cove's sporting gesture was welcome news after they had earlier beaten the Marinators, who also donated heavily to the Community Chest cause, 4-0 in the inaugural Charity Shield match.

The Mariners take on northern rivals the Newcastle United Jets at Central Coast Stadium to write another page in the history of the east coast derby on New Years Eve.

Mariners playing squad & members

"Players must relax" says Bleiberg

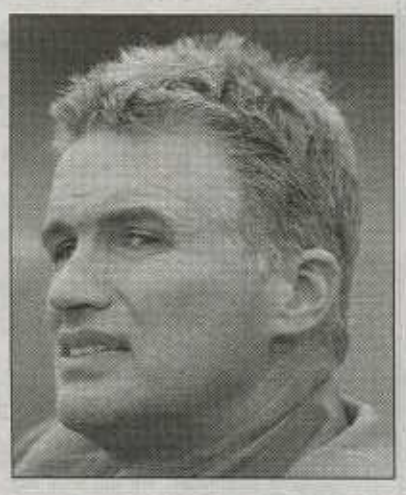
Queensland Roar coach Miron Bleiberg says his team needs to relax in its final six games of the regular A-League season.

With the club back in training ahead of the New Year's Day game in Adelaide, Bleiberg says his side mustn't feel any pressure despite being back in seventh place.

"We won't be emphasising anything to the players other than to go out and prove what a good side they are," he said. "We don't want to play our remaining games thinking about the finals or whether we will be involved or not."

"It's important that the team tries to play without that type of pressure in their minds and hopefully we will relax enough to play our best football."

"One thing I can guarantee is that we will be giving it everything in our last six games and all our opponents will know that they have been playing a good football team. If we don't make it to the finals ourselves we will certainly have a say in who does," he added.



Relax is the key for victory says Roar coach Miron Bleiberg

The club also said that it expects new Brazilian signing Reinaldo to arrive in the country on December 18.

World Cup tickets now on sale

Australian fans now have their chance to book World Cup tickets, but without the option of buying a block for all Socceroos games.

The third and final phase of ticket sales began on Monday and will end on January 15, with all applications made in that time to go into a draw.

Australia is expected to get an allocation of just 10,000 tickets for the three games.

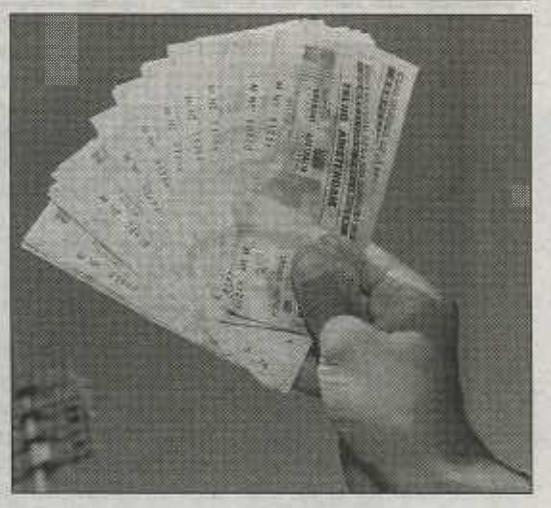
Unfortunately for Australian fans, the Team-Specific Tickets (TSTs) - which gave holders access to all group games of a particular team - are no longer available due to their popularity in earlier sales phases.

Applications are limited to one per household and all applications are binding and can not be rescinded.

Security measures at Germany '06 include having the identity of the ticket-holder on the ticket - with identity checks at the stadium gates - thus severely reducing the operation of scalpers.

Australia's group games are all in southern Germany - Stuttgart, Kaiserslautern and Munich.

The tickets are available on **www.fifaworldcup.com**



Get your World Cup tickets as soon as you can

Victory accept three match ban

Muscat on the receiving end

Outed for three weeks – Melbourne Victory's Kevin Muscat (left) show facing off Sydney's Sasho Petrovkski

Melbourne Victory is not expected to appeal skipper Kevin Muscat's three-game ban for violent conduct despite expressing disappointment at the severity of the penalty.

Muscat became the first A-League player to appear before a Football Federation Australia disciplinary hearing, receiving a two-game ban for violent conduct during Melbourne's round 15 loss to Sydney and a mandatory one-match suspension for accumulating four yellow cards.

A gutted Muscat, solicitor Chris Nikou and Victory officials Gary Cole and Darren Gosling refused to comment as they left FFA headquarters in Sydney.

But Melbourne chief executive Gosling later told the club's website: "Naturally we're very disappointed. The club will sit down and look at all options before commenting further."

Victory, though, is not expected to appeal the outcome and, despite losing its skipper and key defender for three of the final six rounds, appear prepared to cop the decision on the chin.

It is the second time this season Muscat has been banned, having served a one-match suspension against Newcastle in round 12 after receiving a red card against Queensland the previous week.

The former Socceroo will next be available to play against Newcastle in round 19 on January 22 and his extended Christmas break will be a major blow to Melbourne's finals prospects.

Melbourne currently sit three points outside the top four in sixth place and next plays Perth at Olympic Park on December 27.

One of the pre-season favourites, the Victory has won just one of its past seven games - against strugglers New Zealand - since crushing Sydney FC 5-0 in October.

The hearing was something of a test case for the A-League, and the FFA is believed to be happy it has taken 15 rounds, and 60 games, for the first charge to be presented.

A total of 12 players have already served mandatory one-week bans for red cards - Queensland midfielder Matt McKay is the only player to receive two reds - while 12 others have served, or will serve, one-week suspensions for accumulating four yellow cards.

The closed hearing went for nearly two hours with FFA appointed disciplinary arbitrator Tony O'Reilly - a sports law specialist - handing down the decision after the meeting with Muscat and his legal and club representatives. Muscat hasn't had the best of disciplinary records throughout his career in Europe.

Apart from having accumulated a number of red and yellow cards, the high point came when he was sued by former Charlton player Matty Holmes for a career ending tackle.

It is expected that either Mark Byrnes or Daniel Piorkowski will fill the role of the former Socceroos defender.

O'Neill backs NZ Knights

FFA are willing to assist New Zealand Knights bounce back from this season's disastrous campaign, says chief executive John O'Neill.

"We want to keep them ... but it's not up to the FFA to subsidise them," O'Neill told the Daily Telegraph.

"We can't throw money at a New Zealand franchise.

"New Zealand collectively, whether through private investors or Soccer New Zealand, have to get the Knights back on track on and off the field. And we'll do whatever we can to aid them in achieving that."

Helping out their cause the Knights has entered into a partnership with sport and injury care provider Qoleum in a deal that includes the exclusive provision of Qoleum products to the Knights players to aid them in injury prevention, recovery and training.

Knights CEO Steve O'Hara is pleased to have such a progressive company join forces with the Knights.

"Qoleum impressed us immediately with their positive attitude and approach to marketing. The product range looks great and is a superb fit with our programme and our players needs and requirements. Like us they are a start up company here in New Zealand and have recognized the potential in such a partnership."

Qoleum is created by Rebecca Day who has spent many years working with the Worlds top professional athletes as a Sports physio and is looking forward to the partnership with the NZ Knights.

"Working with athletes at this level I understand the needs and requirements demanded from the body and the importance of injury prevention, recovery and training performance to achieve the ultimate from the human body. Qoleum is sold around Europe since 1999 and we are looking to expand into the NZ and Australian markets. New Zealand is a great place to start as it's such a sporty nation and we are pleased to have struck a deal with the Knights."

Qoleum has a total of 17 products in the collection with an extensive physio line complemented by other massage oils, bath oils, shower gels – all of which use organic oils where possible.

Qoleum is not only concerned with the welfare of top athletes. A new collection of products that does the same for race horses has just been released plus Qoleum produces the pure Anointing oils for churches!

Court rejects Saints, Eagles

When the streamlined NSW Premier League kicks off for the first time in January, rejected teams St George Saints and Bonnyrigg White Eagles will still be out in the cold, the Supreme Court has decided.

The court threw out proceedings brought by the two clubs to declare the new 10-team competition invalid, rejecting the argument that selection procedures for the new league were unfair.

Justice Barrett awarded costs to Soccer NSW for the six days of court proceedings that started on November 22.

But the case was dismissed on a technicality and the facts were not even considered, according to the clubs' legal team.

The court found as the Saints and White Eagles were members of Soccer NSW they were bound by its constitution.

It did not matter whether the governing body "kept moving the goalposts" - as alleged by the clubs - or not, as the board had the legal power to act at its own discretion.

President of the board of Soccer NSW Tom Doumanis welcomed the court's decision in a statement, but made no mention of the reasons behind it.

"The Supreme Court's decision vindicates our initiative to introduce the new regional competition, the assessment process and the Board's courage to make what was a very difficult decision by opting for 10 clubs in the first 2 years of the new competition," Doumanis said.

But Saints president Ross Gardener vowed to fight on and appealed against the decision as early as last Thursday.

"Listening to the evidence, I thought we would win it," he said.

"The selection process was subjective not objective ... it was about soccer politics."

All teams in the existing competition were invited to apply for admission to the new league in August.

They were subject to a rigorous evaluation, which focused mainly on stadium facilities, finances and club organisation, but also looked at supporter behaviour.

The Saints believed they had met the criteria and were furious when their historic club - once home to late football legend Johnny Warren - missed the cut.

The Eagles made the headlines last March when their Serbian fans clashed violently with Sydney United's Croat supporters.

The violence at United's Edensor Park was cited at the time to justify the move from the old ethnically-based National Soccer League to the new A-League.

Sydney United was invited to join Marconi Stallions, A.P.I.A.-Leichhardt, Manly United, Bankstown City Lions, Parramatta Eagles, Sydney Olympic FC, Sutherland Sharks, Wollongong Wolves and Blacktown City Demons in the new Premier League.

The competition could expand to allow two new teams to join in 2008, Soccer NSW said.

Popovic sweats on Cup solution

Australian defender Tony Popovic is hoping a solution can be found to a World Cup ruling that threatens to ban him from his club's biggest game.

FIFA has ruled that all players in World Cup squads are not allowed to play a club match after May 15, with the exception of the Champions League final.

However there is a chance that Popovic's English Championship club Crystal Palace could be involved in play-offs for a place in the Premier League after that date.

The Championship play-off final is regarded as the richest match in world football, such is the financial reward of playing in the money-soaked Premiership.

"The timing of the playoffs could be quite tight," Popovic said.

"If we get to the final, the rule states no player should play after May 15."

"But I'm sure if we get into that situation something could be sorted out."

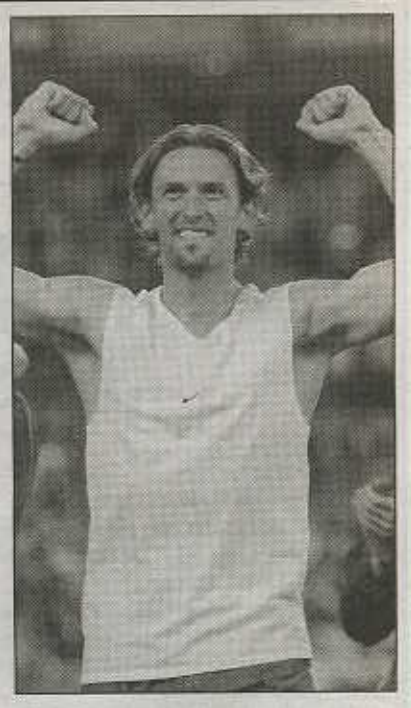
"FIFA just want to give us as much preparation time as possible."

The big defender believes Palace are still in the hunt for a spot in the playoffs series despite being a number of points adrift of first and second spot being Reading and Sheffield United who are favoured to gain entry into next year's English Premier League.

"We're only two points off the play-offs and we have two games in hand on most of our rival.

"You won't see anyone at the training ground being pessimistic. We still want automatic promotion and we're not going to stop fighting. We know we have to go on a run now, but we know we're capable of that."

Popovic has missed most of the season with injury, but recovered in time for the World Cup qualifier against Uruguay, where he starred in the away leg and was subbed off in the Sydney match after picking up an early yellow card.



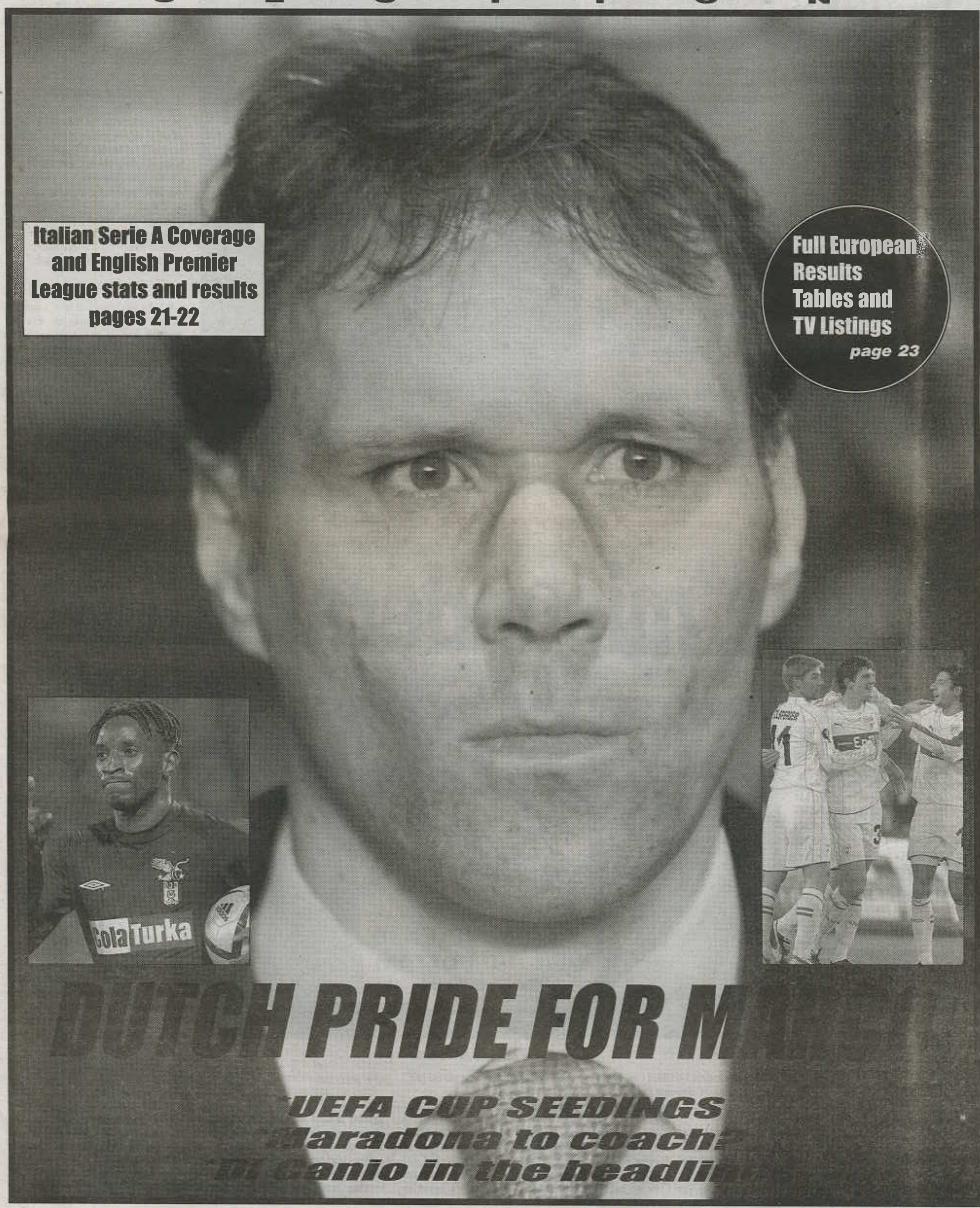
English Premier League return is on the cards for Palace's Aussie defender Tony Popovic

He took part in Palace's 1-1 draw with Wolves on the weekend, and is eager to stake his claim for a starting berth for the World Cup.

"First we get the world champions (Brazil), then - with my Croatian background - we get Croatia, and to top it all off, I used to play in Japan and still have friends there," Popovic said in The Sun.

"It was the perfect draw."

WORLD SECTION



Italian Serie A Coverage and English Premier League stats and results pages 21-22

Full European Results Tables and TV Listings page 23

DUTCH PRIDE FOR M

UEFA CUP SEEDINGS
Maradona to coach
Ganio in the headli

Learning from Dutch masters

By Berend Scholten

Next summer's FIFA World Cup will be a unique event for the Netherlands in more ways than one.

Not only because the Oranje are back after missing the 2002 tournament or that Germany is the scene of their only international triumph, the UEFA European Championship in 1988.

But also because this time Dutch coaches will head the challenge of no fewer than four competing nations.

Dutch way

Marco van Basten will lead the Netherlands after guiding them through the qualifying stages without losing a game.

It will be Van Basten's first experience of a major tournament as coach, but his compatriot Guus Hiddink is already on to his third, this time with Australia. Leo Beenhakker, with Trinidad and Tobago, and Dick Advocaat, the Korean Republic, complete the Dutch lineup. Both are heading to the World Cup for the second time as a coach.

Reker proud

Advocaat was appointed after the Korean Republic had qualified, but as Jan Reker proudly points out, "it was still a Dutchman who got them there - Jo Bonfrere." Reker has every reason to be proud. He is head of the Dutch professional coaches association, and with a Dutchman at the helm of one in eight teams at the World Cup, the rest of the world appears to have much to learn from his organisation.

'Tip of the iceberg'

"They are just the tip of the iceberg," Reker tells uefa.com. "In total there are 93 Dutch coaches working abroad worldwide, including youth coaches and assistants. As well as the World Cup coaches we have four other national team coaches, Jelle Goes, with Estonia, Henk Wisman, with Armenia, Azing Griever, at Aruba, and Jan Brouwer with Gambia; not to mention club coaches such as Martin Jol and Frank Rijkaard."

'Very beautiful'

Not that Reker is claiming that the Dutch are in a league of their own. "Four coaches is not a record," he says.

"In 1998 there were five French coaches and four Brazilian coaches. But we share second spot and that is very beautiful for a country like the Netherlands." According to Reker, it is a mixture of qualities that makes Dutch coaches so sought after.

"As a sea-faring nation the Dutch have been exploring new worlds and cultures for a long time. Dutchmen adjust easily in other cultures, speak their languages. They are not afraid of adventure and are inventive."

'World famous'

The Dutch began exporting their football expertise in the 1970s when their great club sides began to flourish. Demand soared after the Dutch thrilled the world at the 1974 FIFA World Cup. It was the late Rinus Michels who laid the foundations. Under him, the Netherlands developed their own footballing brand, Total Football, instantly recognizable for its attacking invention.

Dutch coach Marco Van Basten will be one of four from his homeland on show in the World Cup next year

"We then also developed our own style of training," Reker says. "Our training academy at the Dutch FA in Zeist is world famous."

Communication

The class of 2006 have followed different routes to the top. Few could match the heights Van Basten hit as a player, while Beenhakker did not play at the highest level at all. Advocaat and Hiddink played their football in the Eredivisie before stepping up to coaching.

Reker won the Eredivisie as coach of PSV in 1986 with Hiddink as his assistant. He certainly knew what he was looking for in his right-hand man.

Persuasive

"Personality and knowledge are very important, but most important is that you are able to express your ideas to make the players understand you.

That's why there are a lot of examples of really top players who don't succeed as coaches at the highest level. It's because they always played on intuition and expressed themselves with their feet. As a coach you have to convince other people of your ideas."

'Field experience'

Dutch coaches have had to learn to be creative. Clubs in the Eredivisie cannot afford to rely on money alone to produce results. Close attention is paid to the nurturing of young players, but also to helping the next generation of trainers take their first steps on the coaching ladder.

"The coaches are open towards each other, and give young coaches the possibility to work with them to get field experience," Reker says. "Top coaches also give demonstrations during classes."

'Like a god'

It helps too when you have a coach of Hiddink's calibre setting the example. "Hiddink was the best ambassador with the Korean Republic [during the 2002 FIFA World Cup] that Holland could have wished for. He was like a god in a nation that had never done anything important before.

To take them to the semi-finals at a World Cup competing with the best nations in the world… that increased the status of the Dutch coaches still further." With Van Basten leading the Dutch challenge in Germany, that stock is set to climb even higher.

A wee misunderstanding

By Jim Wirth

A fourth-level footballer in England is back in business after briefly being dismissed by his club for urinating in their car park. Macclesfield Town FC striker Kevin Townson was horrified to be handed 14 days notice after being spotted answering a call of nature outside the club's Moss Rose Stadium.

"I'd been on a two-hour journey to training in the morning," he said.

"We came into a car park and I was dying for the toilet. I looked around and there was nobody about but somebody somewhere saw it and made a complaint to the club." Club chairman Rob Bickerton promptly presented Towsnson with a letter confirming his dismissal, much to the 22-year-old's consternation.

"I've got a mortgage to pay and it's coming up to Christmas," he said. Clearly, however, the club has since discovered some seasonal spirit. Having been accused of trying to dismiss the player simply to ease their wage bill, Macclesfield have relented, issuing Townson with a fine but keeping him on staff. "All parties are keen to put this incident behind them and we welcome Kevin back to the club," said a club statement.

A club car park and NOT a toilet

A load of Boloni

Stade Rennais FC coach Laszlo Boloni was so appalled with his side's first-half performance in their 1-0 UEFA Cup defeat at home against FC Shakhtar Donetsk that he left the pitch three minutes before the interval.

The Romanian railed against his side's "lack of physical impact" until eventually he could take no more, heading for the tunnel on 42 minutes.

"I couldn't stand what I saw and had to prepare my team talk for the second half," he said in mitigation.

Meanwhile, one of France's other UEFA Cup representatives, RC Lens, have been presented with an unusual injury problem ahead of their decisive final Group C game at home against UC Sampdoria played over the week after coach Francis Gillot pulled a hamstring while playing in a charity game.

Once an impressively pacy defender, the 45-year-old Gillot was struck down on Saturday as Lens' technical staff earned a 5-3 win against local scientists as a benefit for research into genetic disease.

With Gillot being ordered to rest, someone else may have to perform his more strenuous coaching duties next week by leaping off the bench waving his fists and shouting orders on his behalf.

Salad days

The finals are six months away, but already the stream of stupid FIFA World Cup stories is turning into a torrent.

First in the host nation, thieves in Berlin have been getting into the spirit of the event after 22 German national team shirts were exhibited in glass cabinets at different locations in the city.

Within a few days, 18 had been stolen.

In Saudi Arabia, the education authorities have decided to shift the dates of school and university exams to allow young fans to watch their national team's performance at the finals.

Meanwhile, in other English news, World Cup coach Sven Goran-Eriksson has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by his partner Nancy Dell'Olio. She told an Italian television show that she believes her Swedish beau deserves the award for his work for the charity Truce.

"I hope that Sven wins the World Cup next year and I hope that he is named as a candidate for Nobel Peace Prize," she said. Finally, Manchester United FC striker Wayne Rooney's tough-guy image may have been compromised after his fiancée Colleen McLoughlin admitted that he loved nothing more than a nice, slightly effeminate, salad.

"His favourite food is lettuce," she said. "He loves salad."

WORLD NEWS

FIFA RANKINGS

(November 2005)

1	Brazil	841
2	Czech Republic	796
3	Netherlands	791
4	Argentina	774
5	France	772
6	Spain	771
7	Mexico	768
8	USA	766
9	England	757
10	Portugal	754
11	Turkey	749
12	Italy	741
13	Denmark	732
14	Sweden	731
15	Japan	713
16	Germany	710
17	Greece	708
18	Uruguay	706
19	Iran	702
20	Croatia	701
21	Costa Rica	699
22	Cameroon	697
23	Republic of Ireland	696
23	Poland	696
25	Colombia	692
25	Nigeria	692
27	Romania	686
28	Tunisia	683
29	Korea Republic	682
30	Senegal	672
30	Paraguay	672
32	Saudi Arabia	669
33	Egypt	663
34	Russia	662
35	Morocco	655
36	Switzerland	654
37	Ecuador	650
38	Norway	649
39	Bulgaria	638
40	Ukraine	627
41	Cote d'Ivoire	626
41	Honduras	626
43	Jamaica	625
44	Israel	622
45	Slovakia	619
45	Finland	619
47	Serbia and Montenegro	612
48	South Africa	611
49	Australia	610
50	Ghana	608
51	Trinidad and Tobago	607
52	Belgium	603
53	Bahrain	601
54	Zimbabwe	600
55	Guatemala	584
56	Togo	582
57	Zambia	579
58	Uzbekistan	578
59	Belarus	573
59	Mali	573
61	Scotland	572
62	Angola	570
63	Slovenia	562
63	Chile	562
65	Bosnia-Herzegovina	560
65	Peru	560
67	Venezuela	556
68	Kuwait	555
69	China PR	554
70	Latvia	552
71	Hungary	551
72	Austria	550
72	Wales	550
74	Iraq	546
75	Cuba	545
76	Congo DR	542
77	Estonia	541
78	Panama	535
79	Oman	534
80	Guinea	531
81	Qatar	527
82	Algeria	524
83	Libya	523
84	Jordan	521
85	Albania	517
85	Korea DPR	517
87	Canada	512
88	United Arab Emirates	510

Luxemburgo back at Santos

Sacked Real Madrid coach Vanderlei Luxemburgo has agreed to return to Santos, the Brazilian club he left 11 months ago to join the Spaniards.

Luxemburgo's spokesman Luiz Lombardi told Reuters on Tuesday that the former Real coach had negotiated a two-year deal with Santos, the team he led to the Brazilian championship last year.

Real fired Luxemburgo on December 4 following a 1-0 win over Getafe the day before.

Santos have employed three different coaches since Luxemburgo's departure, Oswaldo Oliveira, Alexandre Gallo and Nelsinho, plus Serginho Chulapa as a caretaker.

Vanderlei Luxemburgo from Real Madrid to Santos

Di Canio defends salute

In the head-lines again – Lazio's far right hero Paolo di Canio

Lazio's Paolo di Canio has defended making a raised arm salute at the end their defeat at Livorno two weeks ago.

The incident happened as the controversial 37-year-old walked off after the final whistle under grandstands containing Lazio fans.

"I saluted my people with what for me is a sign of belonging to a group that holds true values, values of civility against the standardisation that this society imposes upon us," the striker told Italian radio station Radio Spazio Aperto.

"I'm proud to be able to count on such people and I will continue to salute them in this way."

The match in Livorno was as much a conflict of political views as a sporting event. Livorno are known in Italy for the hard left-wing politics of their supporters while Lazio's ultras have often aligned themselves with the far right.

The game was played in a poisonous atmosphere. The home supporters chanted anti-fascist songs while the visitors held up a swastika.

"I was the object of very heavy insults throughout the match, but I didn't react," Di Canio said.

It is not the first time Di Canio has made the raised arm gesture. He was fined 10,000 euro ($A15,875) for doing the same at the end of Lazio's win over arch-rivals Roma in January.

Italy's Football League has not taken action over the latest incident. If it does, Di Canio expects his club to defend him.

Maradona backed as coach

Diego Maradona should one day become Argentina's coach, according to the man in charge of his country's World Cup team.

"Diego Maradona should be the coach of Argentina," Jose Pekerman told the Argentine state newsagency Telam in an interview.

"I'm convinced he has to decide what he wants to do but it's a situation that has to come about," said Pekerman, who refers to Maradona as his "greatest idol".

"I don't know what will happen afterwards," he added in reference to next year's World Cup.

Maradona, Argentina's greatest player and captain of their 1986 World Cup-winning team, almost joined the coaching staff last month. He pulled out at the last minute days before Argentina's friendly against England in Geneva without publicising his reasons.

Diego Maradona for Argentinean coach?

Argentine Football Association President Julio Grondona has repeatedly said the doors to the Argentine national team are permanently open to Maradona in any capacity.

FIFA RANKINGS

(November 2005)

89	Burkina Faso	505
90	FYR Macedonia	502
91	Haiti	496
92	Kenya	495
93	Iceland	487
93	Sudan	487
95	Singapore	482
96	Bolivia	474
97	Cyprus	472
98	Lithuania	465
99	Botswana	463
100	Georgia	462
101	Northern Ireland	460
102	Gabon	459
103	Indonesia	455
104	Malawi	450
105	Thailand	449
106	Rwanda	446
107	Syria	442
108	Moldova	441
109	Uganda	434
110	Armenia	430
111	Congo	413
112	Turkmenistan	401
113	Azerbaijan	400
114	Vietnam	399
115	Benin	396
116	Malaysia	393
117	Hong Kong	390
118	New Zealand	388
119	Barbados	387
120	Cape Verde Islands	372
120	El Salvador	372
120	Lebanon	372
123	Malta	371
124	Liechtenstein	365
125	St. Lucia	359
126	St. Vincent and the Grenadines	358
127	Andorra	356
128	Ethiopia	351
128	St. Kitts and Nevis	351
130	Mozambique	344
131	Faroe Islands	332
131	Swaziland	332
133	Liberia	328
134	Yemen	325
135	India	324
136	Fiji	323
137	Palestine	322
138	Solomon Islands	316
139	Kazakhstan	315
140	Tahiti	313
141	Tajikistan	309
142	Myanmar	308
143	Burundi	305
144	Mauritius	292
144	Sri Lanka	292
146	Lesotho	283
147	Maldives	282
148	Vanuatu	276
149	Madagascar	273
150	Grenada	269
151	Surinam	257
152	Luxembourg	256
153	Kyrgyzstan	245
154	Nicaragua	244
155	Antigua and Barbuda	243
156	Chinese Taipei	241
157	San Marino	238
158	Chad	232
158	Bermuda	232
160	Namibia	224
161	Gambia	215
162	Sierra Leone	204
163	British Virgin Islands	202
164	Papua New Guinea	197
165	Laos	195
166	Netherlands Antilles	190
167	Guyana	185
168	Pakistan	180
169	Dominica	179
170	Bangladesh	176
171	Equatorial Guinea	173
172	Eritrea	169
173	Dominican Republic	164
174	Seychelles	156
175	Tanzania	150
176	Cayman Islands	149

EUROPEAN CUP STATS

Champions League & UEFA Cup Round Ups

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Final Standings

GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Q-Juventus	6	5	0	1	12	5	15
Q-Bayern Munchen	6	4	1	1	10	4	13
*Club Brugge	6	2	1	3	6	7	7
Rapid Wien	6	0	0	6	3	15	0

GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Q-Arsenal	6	5	1	0	10	2	16
Q-Ajax	6	3	2	1	10	6	11
*Thun	6	1	1	4	4	9	4
Sparta	6	0	2	4	2	9	2

GROUP C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Q-Barcelona	6	5	1	0	16	2	16
Q-Bremen	6	2	1	3	12	12	7
*Udinese	6	2	1	3	10	12	7
Panathinaikos	6	1	1	4	4	16	4

GROUP D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Q-Villarreal	6	2	4	0	3	1	10
Q-Benfica	6	2	2	2	5	5	8
*Lille	6	1	3	2	1	2	6
Man. United	6	1	3	2	3	4	6

GROUP E

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Q-Milan	6	3	2	1	12	6	11
Q-PSV	6	3	1	2	4	6	10
*Schalke	6	2	2	2	12	9	8
Fenerbahce	6	1	1	4	7	14	4

GROUP F

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Q-Lyon	6	5	1	0	13	4	16
Q-Real Madrid	6	3	1	2	10	8	10
*Rosenborg	6	1	1	4	6	11	4
Olympiacos	6	1	1	4	7	13	4

GROUP G

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Q-Liverpool	6	3	3	0	6	1	12
Q-Chelsea	6	3	2	1	7	1	11
*Betis	6	2	1	3	3	7	7
Anderlecht	6	1	0	5	1	8	3

GROUP H

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Inter Milan	6	4	1	1	9	4	13
Rangers	6	1	4	1	7	7	7
*Artmedia	6	1	3	2	5	9	6
Porto	6	1	2	3	8	9	5

Guide

Q - Indicates the team has gone through to the next phase of the champions league

*** - Indicates the team has gone through to the UEFA Cup finals series**

UEFA CUP GROUP STAGES

Palermo players celebrate their passage towards the final 32 teams in the UEFA Cup

Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Monaco	4	3	0	1	6	2	9
Hamburg	4	3	0	1	5	2	9
Slavia	4	1	1	2	6	8	4
Viking	4	1	1	2	3	6	4
CSKA Sofia	4	1	0	3	5	7	3

Results

Monaco 2 vs CSKA Sofia 1
Hamburg 2 vs Slavia 0

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Palermo	4	2	2	0	6	2	8
Espanyol	4	2	2	0	4	2	8
Lokomotiv	4	2	1	1	8	3	7
Brondby	4	1	1	2	5	8	4
Petach-Tikva	4	0	0	4	1	9	0

Results

Espanyol 1 vs Maccabi 0
Palermo 3 vs Brondby 0

Group C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Steaua	4	2	2	0	7	0	8
Lens	4	2	1	1	7	5	7
Hertha	4	1	3	0	1	0	6
Sampdoria	4	1	2	1	4	3	5
Halmstad	4	0	0	4	1	12	0

Results

Hertha Berlin 0 vs Steaua Bucharest 0
Lens 2 vs Sampdoria 1

Group D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mid'brough	4	3	1	0	6	0	10
AZ	4	3	1	0	5	1	10
Litex	4	2	0	2	4	5	6
Dnipro	4	1	0	3	4	9	3
Grasshoppers	4	0	0	4	3	7	0

Results

Middlesbrough 2 vs Litex 0
AZ Alkmaar 1 vs Grasshoppers 0

Group E

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Strasbourg	4	2	2	0	7	3	8
Roma	4	2	1	1	7	6	7
Basel	4	2	0	2	7	9	6
Red Star	4	1	1	2	7	8	4
Tromso	4	1	0	3	7	9	3

Results

Roma 3 vs Basel 1
Strasbourg 2 vs Red Star 2

Group F

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Marseille	4	3	0	1	5	3	9
Levski	4	2	0	2	4	4	6
Heerenveen	4	1	2	1	2	2	5
CSKA	4	1	1	2	3	4	4
Dinamo	4	1	1	2	2	3	4

Results

Marseille 2 vs Dinamo Bucharest 1
Heerenveen 2 vs Levski 1

Group G

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rapid	4	3	0	1	5	2	9
Shakhtar	4	3	0	1	4	1	9
Stuttgart	4	3	0	1	6	4	9
PAOK	4	1	0	3	6	5	3
Rennes	4	0	0	4	1	10	0

Results

Stuttgart 2 vs Rapid 1
PAOK 5 vs Rennes 1

Group H

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sevilla	4	2	1	1	8	4	7
Zenit	4	2	1	1	5	4	7
Bolton	4	1	3	0	4	3	6
Besiktas	4	1	2	1	5	6	5
Guimaræes	4	0	1	3	4	9	1

Results

V.Guimaraeas 1 vs Besiktas 3
Bolton 1 vs Sevilla 1

UEFA CUP ROUND OF 32

1st-leg matches: 15/16 February
2nd-leg matches: 23 February

Litex Lovech v Strasbourg
Stuttgart v Middlesbrough
Slavia Praha v Palermo
Heerenveen v FC Steaua Bucuresti
Lokomotiv Moskva v Sevilla
Bolton Wanderers v Marseille
Hertha Berlin v Rapid Bucuresti
Basel v AS Monaco
Udinese v RC Lens
Rosenborg v Zenit St. Petersburg
Club Brugge v AS Roma
Schalke v Espanyol
Lille v Shakhtar Donetsk
Thun v Hamburger
Real Betis v AZ Alkmaar
Artmedia v Levski Sofia

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE ROUND OF 16 FIXTURES

Chelsea FC v FC Barcelona
Real Madrid CF v Arsenal FC
Werder Bremen v Juventus
FC Bayern MUnchen v AC Milan
PSV Eindhoven v Olympique Lyonnais
AFC Ajax v FC Internazionale Milano
SL Benfica v Liverpool
Rangers v Villarreal

*** 1st Leg - 21/22 February 2006**
***2nd Leg – 7/8 March 2006**

BARCA & CHELSEA TO MEET AGAIN

The league leaders in England and Spain will meet again in the first knockout round of the UEFA Champions League after Chelsea FC were paired with FC Barcelona in a repeat of the tie that produced two thrilling matches at this stage last season.

Favourites meet

Chelsea have never won the European Champion Clubs' Cup but are among the leading contenders after reaching the semi-finals in each of the last two campaigns. En route to the last four in 2004/05, the Londoners saw off Barca 5-4 on aggregate in the Round of 16, with John Terry scoring a late winning goal at Stamford Bridge. With recently-crowned European Footballer of the Year Ronaldinho in blistering form, the Catalan side will hope to exact revenge.

Fascinating ties

In the ceremony, conducted at UEFA headquarters in Nyon, Switzerland, the eight winners of the group stage pools were paired with teams that finished as runners-up. No clubs from the same association could be pitted together, while sides that met in the group stage were also kept apart. The draw threw up a number of other fascinating ties, not least the coming together of nine-time winners Real Madrid CF and Arsenal FC - another Anglo-Spanish affair. FC Bayern Munchen, champions of Europe on four occasions, drew last season's runners-up AC Milan.

Inter-Ajax

Italian title-holders Juventus face Werder Bremen, while FC Internazionale Milano will encounter another club with a proud European pedigree, AFC Ajax. The Amsterdam team's fellow Eredivisie challengers PSV Eindhoven, semi-finalists last term, landed Olympique Lyonnais in a repeat of the quarter-final won by the Dutch side in April. The French champions overpowered Bremen 10-2 on aggregate at this stage last season, and the Bundesliga outfit face another stern test in Juve.

Holders face Benfica

The two clubs appearing in the UEFA Champions League knockout rounds for the first time, Rangers FC and Villarreal CF, will compete for a place in the last eight, while holders Liverpool FC must tackle SL Benfica, Manchester United FC's nemesis. The Round of 16 will take place over two legs on 21/22 February and 7/8 March, with the group winner in each tie playing the second leg at home.

Paris match

At its meeting on Monday, the UEFA Club Competitions Committee agreed that, due to the stadium clash between Milan and Inter, the Nerazzurri would play their return match on Tuesday 14 March as they finished below Milan in Serie A last season. After this round, the quarter-finals and semi-finals will follow before the final, due to be staged at the Stade de France in Paris on 17 May.

ITALIAN SERIE A

Italian Affair

By Joe Russo

Great to see that Inter coach Roberto Mancini is an eternal optimist. After the recent derby at the San Siro, where his side beat AC Milan 3-2 in a thrilling contest, he stated that his team can seriously challenge Juventus for the title. Now don't laugh – he may have a point.

For most people Juventus are already home with the 2005/06 Scudetto and, given their record so far in the Serie A, it would hard to disagree with them.

However, Inter's recent victory in the derby brought them to within ten points of Juventus and whist that makes them a clear four wins away from overtaking the Turin giants, it is not an insurmountable task.

The Serie A season is extremely long and arduous and a bad spell, combined with a series of injuries, could bring Juventus back to the field. In fact it would be good to have a much more competitive league without one team streaking away with the title so early in the season.

★ ★ ★ ★

It was interesting to read that Lothar Matthaus is embroiled in a World Cup draw controversy. According to some media reports in Italy the great former German captain is said to have rigged the draw against Italy.

Sky Italia television channel has accused him of picking up a ball in Pot Four for Italy's group before replacing it and pulling out another. It implies obviously that the great Matthaus conscientiously rigged the draw.

Sky Italia claims hot and cold balls were prepared allowing him to know who he was picking for Italy's group. However, the former Inter great of the late 1980s and early 1990s has hit back claiming that the Italians are mad. And, sadly, he is probably correct.

There can no question that Italy has a tough group, but it certainly doesn't help the cause of the Azzurri when Sky Italia is making up such a theory.

Matthaus' career with both Inter and Germany was a long and illustrious one. In fact in his days at Inter they won the Scudetto back in 1989, the last time that the club has won the league title in Italy.

It would be absurd to think that such a great footballer would allow his image to be tarnished by trying to rig the draw.

★ ★ ★ ★

Lazio's Paolo Di Canio has had another brain explosion. Fans of the English Premier League will fondly remember both his great skills but also his frequent displays of madness.

The veteran striker, now in his second season at Lazio, raised an arm to salute the visiting Lazio fans at Livorno last week. The problem is that the gesture is a fascist salute or what in Italy is called a 'Roman salute'.

The incident happened as Di Canio walked off and waved to Lazio fans in a certain section of the little Tuscan ground.

Over the years Lazio have been known to have extremely racist supporters. Players with African backgrounds have often been the victims of their racist chants. The game certainly doesn't need players like Di Canio encouraging them in any way.

Livorno are known in Italy for the left-wing politics of their supporters while Lazio's fans are often associated with the far right. The home supporters chanted anti-fascist songs and the visitors retaliated by holding up a swastika.

★ ★ ★ ★

Zeljko Kalac is the second choice goalkeeper at AC Milan behind the Brazilian Dida. Should anything happen to Dida it widely acknowledged that Kalac would step straight into the team.

However, the latest news emanating from Milan is that former Italy goalkeeper, Francesco Toldo, could well switch next month in the transfer window from Inter to AC Milan.

If Toldo was to be signed by AC Milan it would be interesting to see then where Kalac would fit in. The goalkeeping situation at AC Milan is rather complicated but here's a summary.

Last year Dida was number one and another former Italian international, Christian Abbiati, was second choice. When Kalac was signed, Abbiati was lent to Juventus to cover for the injured Gianluigi Buffon. Now that Buffon is recovering it looks like Abbiati will go from Juventus to Palermo in a more permanent move.

Meanwhile at Inter Toldo is now second choice to Julio Cesar and he desperately wants to leave the club. And it's here that AC Milan come into the picture. However, one would wonder why Toldo would want to go from Inter to AC Milan where he would only be second choice to Dida, a situation he is trying to avoid at Inter?

Sydney readers can tune into Sunday Night Soccer, on 98.5 FM every Sunday at 10.00pm, for all the latest local and international football news.

SAMPDORIA 1
AS ROMA 1

Honours were shared even between Sampdoria and AS Roma as it complete the final fixture on Sunday.

Inspirational AS Roma skipper Francesco Totti fired the away side in the lead on 15 minutes after a well-taken goal but Francesco Flachi converted a spot-kick in the 56th minute to earn the home side a point.

After their exit from the UEFA Cup, Sampdoria have hit a tough run and are currently running seventh in the Serie A, a far cry from their terrific start to the season while Roma, still in the UEFA Cup, have progressed slowly.

CHIEVO VERONA 2
UDINESE 0

Udinese's chances of repeating last season's excellent fourth-place finish are fading fast after they slumped to their third successive defeat.

Simone Tiribocchi headed the home side in front from a corner in the 34th minute and Udinese were reduced to 10 men shortly after the break when Stefano Mauri received a second yellow card. Chievo doubled their lead when winger Luciano was tripped in the area and Victor Obinna sent Morgan De Sanctis the wrong way from the penalty spot.

EMPOLI 1
FIORENTINA 1

Fiorentina dropped one place to fourth after enduring a frustrating afternoon against their Tuscan neighbours.

Luca Toni and Stefano Fiore went close to putting the visitors ahead several times before Giampaolo Pazzini kneed the ball over the line in the 70th minute. Empoli midfielder Ighli Vannucchi grabbed a close-range equaliser three minutes later.

AC MILAN 4
MESSINA 0

Milan needed an Andriy Shevchenko penalty -- awarded for a dubious Matthew Olorunleke foul on Alberto Gilardino midway through the first half -- to get them on their way after 22 minutes.

Shevchenko's clinical finish from Kaka's backheel at the start of the second half made it 2-0 and late strikes by Andrea Pirlo and Gilardino killed off the contest as Milan climbed one place to third.

Juventus' David Trezeguet (left) and Lazio's Fabio Liverani in action during their 1-1 draw at the Olympic Stadium in Rome

Chievo's Simone Tiribocchi (left) celebrates with his teammate Federico Giunti after scoring against Udinese

PALERMO 0
LIVORNO 2

Livorno had reserve goalkeeper Marco Amelia to thank as they racked up their third Serie A win in a row to consolidate fifth place. Amelia pulled off a series of saves to prevent Palermo taking a first-half lead before the visitors struck with a goal by Marc Pfertzel. Palermo's frustration bubbled over in the closing stages when Michele Ferri was sent off for a heavy challenge on Ibrahima Bakayoko. Stefano Morrone scored Livorno's second goal on the break.

REGGINA 0
INTER MILAN 4

Second-placed Inter made it five wins in a row and cut Juventus's lead at the top of the division to eight points with this easy win. It took Inter just two minutes to find the net.

Home keeper Nicola Pavarini parried Dejan Stankovic's free kick and Ivan Cordoba poked home the loose ball. Strikers Obafemi Martins and Adriano extended their lead before halftime and David Pizarro wrapped up the result in stoppage time.

SIENA 2
PARMA 2

Siena seemed on course for victory after goals by strikers Tomas Locatelli and Enrico Chiesa cancelled out Bernardo Corradi's 47th-minute strike. But in the third minute of stoppage time, Daniele Dessena scuffed the ball over the line to give relegation-threatened Parma a point.

LAZIO 1
JUVENTUS 1

Serie A leaders Juventus arrived in Rome having won 14 of their opening 15 matches, but ran into a slick and determined Lazio side that took a 16th-minute lead through Tommaso Rocchi.

The visitors quickly equalised courtesy of a typically opportunistic goal by David Trezeguet, the French international's 14th in 14 Serie A appearances this season.

TREVISO 2
LECCE 1

Goals by Pinga and Emanuele Filippini gave Treviso their first home win of the season in this dogfight between Serie A's bottom two sides. Treviso are now 19th out of 20 clubs. Mirko Vucinic's penalty could not save Lecce from sinking to last place.

SERIE A

Lazio 1 Juventus 1, Treviso 2 Lecce 1, AC Milan 4 - 0 Messina, Cagliari 2 - 1 Ascoli, Chievo 2 - 0 Udinese, Empoli 1 - 1 Fiorentina, Palermo 0 - 2 Livorno, Reggina 0 - 4 Inter Milan, Siena 2 - 2 Parma, Sampdoria 1-1 AS Roma

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1. Juventus	**16**	**14**	**1**	**1**	**36**	**9**	**43**
2. Inter Milan	16	11	2	3	32	13	35
3. Milan	16	11	1	4	36	18	34
4. Fiorentina	16	10	3	3	31	17	33
5. Livorno	16	9	4	3	19	14	31
6. Chievo	16	7	6	3	20	15	27
7. Sampdoria	16	7	4	5	27	21	25
8. Lazio	16	6	5	5	21	22	23
9. Palermo	16	5	7	4	24	24	22
10. Roma	16	5	6	5	23	20	21
11. Udinese	16	6	2	8	16	23	20
12. Siena	16	5	4	7	23	28	19
13. Empoli	16	5	3	8	18	24	18
14. Reggina	16	5	2	9	16	25	17
15. Ascoli	16	2	8	6	15	20	14
16. Messina	16	2	6	8	13	24	12
17. Cagliari	16	2	6	8	14	27	12
18. Parma	16	2	5	9	15	28	11
19. Treviso	16	2	5	9	10	23	11
20. Lecce	16	3	2	11	14	28	11

FIXTURES

ROUND 16

Wednesday 21st December

Ascoli v Treviso
Fiorentina v Palermo
Inter Milan v Empoli
Juventus v Siena
Lecce v Lazio
Livorno v AC Milan
Messina v Reggina
Parma v Cagliari
AS Roma v Chievo
Udinese v Sampdoria

ENGLISH

EVERTON 0
BOLTON WANDERERS . . .4

Beaten on Wednesday by West Ham, Everton rounded off a miserable week with a real second-half drubbing by Sam Allardyce's UEFA Cup hopefuls.

The scoring started with a looping header from Kevin Davies after 32 minutes. The match turned midway through the second half when Everton's Scottish forward James McFadden had a potential equaliser disallowed for offside and, minutes later, Greek midfielder Stelios Giannakopoulos beat keeper Richard Wright. Gary Speed then converted a 79th minute penalty and Giannakopoulos turned victory into a rout with a superb shot.

FULHAM 2
BLACKBURN ROVERS . . .1

Chris Coleman's men continued their move away from the danger zone with a precious victory at Craven Cottage. .

Giant Senegalese midfielder Pape Bouba Diop steered the ball home just before halftime after a free kick taken by Luis Boa Morte. The Portuguese forward went one better in the 52nd minute, scoring Fulham's second to wrap up the points, despite a 90th minute own goal by Fulham defender Zat Knight.

PORTSMOUTH 1
W BROMWICH ALBION . .0

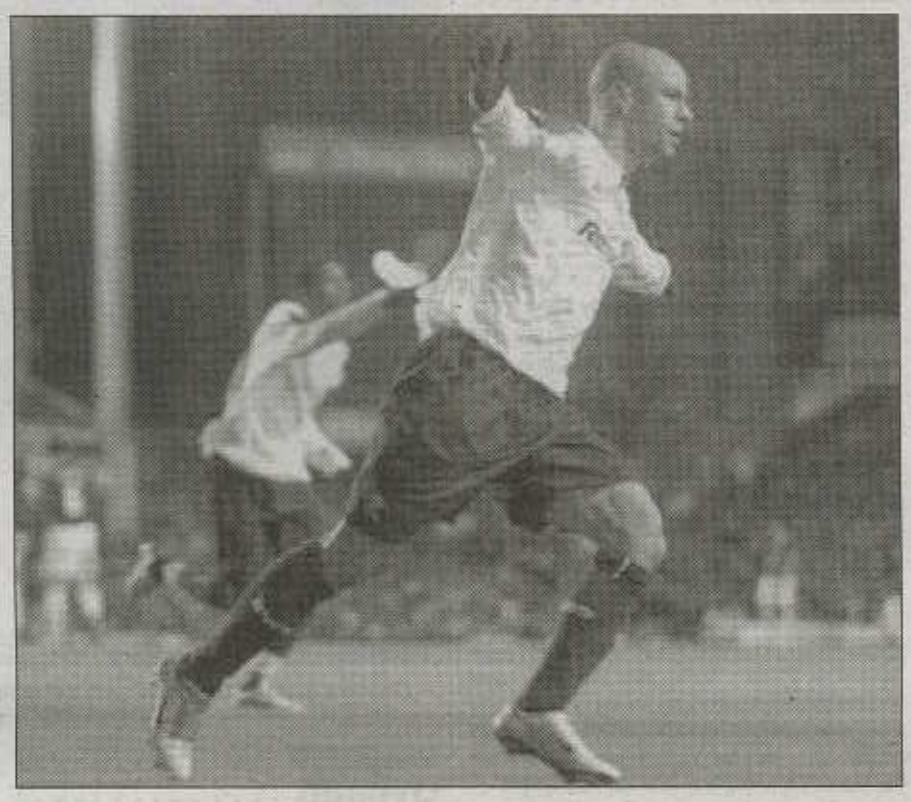
Bulgarian striker Svetoslav Todorov came off the bench to provide a happy ending to Harry Redknapp's first home match in charge since his controversial return from Southampton.

Todorov struck in the 56th minute, off a cross by strike partner Lomana LuaLua, but his team mates had their backs to the wall in the closing stages as West Brom piled on the pressure. Pompey held on for their first home win of the season.

WEST HAM UNITED 2
NEWCASTLE UNITED . . .4

England striker Michael Owen scored a hat-trick to give Newcastle another morale-boosting win after their victory over Arsenal last weekend.

Pompey manager Harry Redknapp claimed his first win for the club since taking over the reigns with a hard fought 1-0 win over WBA



Greek International star Stellios Giannakopoulous celebrates his brace against Everton

Owen scored after four minutes but team mate Nolberto Solano, who hit last week's winner against Arsenal, followed up with an own goal, turning in Marlon Harewood's cross.

The Peruvian winger made amends with a fine cross for Owen to poach his second and skipper Alan Shearer chipped in with the third off an Owen pass to score his 199th goal for the club.

Harewood gave West Ham hope, converting a 72nd minute penalty after a handball by Newcastle striker Shola Ameobi, but Owen brought up his hat-trick with a 90th minute tap-in.

WIGAN ATHLETIC 3
CHARLTON ATHLETIC . . .0

After a run of five straight defeats at the hands of the Premier League's top clubs, Senegal striker Henri Camara scored a hat-trick to revive the fortunes of Paul Jewell's men.

Camara got off the mark after nine minutes when he snapped up the rebound after Lee McCulloch's shot hit the bar. Charlton's defensive frailties were exposed after the break when Camara followed up with a shot from a Jason Roberts knockdown and a close-range finish in the 63rd minute.

MANCHESTER CITY 4
BIRMINGHAM CITY 1

A demolition job by Stuart Pearce's side added to the problems faced by Birmingham's manager Steve Bruce.

Birmingham made a dismal start, conceding a goal to David Sommeil in the first minute and then a penalty, converted by Joey Barton. Antoine Sibierski headed home before the break and Bradley Wright-Phillips got the fourth in the 70th minute with a downward half-volley, two minutes after coming off the bench.

Czech midfielder Jiri Jarosik, on loan from Chelsea, scored Birmingham's consolation goal six minutes later, beating David James with a low shot. The final twist was a late red card for Birmingham keeper Nico Vaesen, for a handball outside the area.

ARSNEAL 0
CHELSEA 2

Chelsea won their first league game at Highbury since 1990 with goals from Arjen Robben and Joe Cole.

Robben was put through by Didier Drogba in the 39th minute and ran 25 metres before slotting the ball at a sharp angle past Jens Lehmann. Cole beat Lauren to the ball on the right and cut inside, wrong-footing Sol Campbell before finding the net in the 73rd.

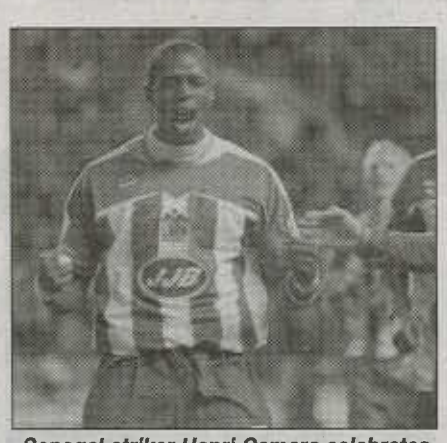
The champions moved nine points clear of second-placed Manchester United and 20 ahead of Arsenal.

MIDDLESBROUGH 3
TOTTENHAM 3

Robbie Keane put Spurs ahead in the 25th minute with a scuffed goal from 16 metres, only for Aiyegbeni Yakubu to equalise with a fine volley five minutes later.

Middlesbrough made it 2-1 when a searing shot from James Morrison deflected into the net off Yakubu shortly before halftime. Tottenham equalised in the 63rd from a free kick, Jermaine Jenas curling the ball expertly over the corner of the Middlesbrough wall into the net from 25 metres.

Middlesbrough went ahead again through a Franck Queudrue header which bounced against the bar and just over the line but seven minutes from time Mido replied for Spurs, jumping high to head home from a corner.



Senegal striker Henri Camara celebrates his famous hat-trick over Charlton over the weekend

FIXTURES

Monday December 26th

Charlton	v	Arsenal
Chelsea	v	Fulham
Tottenham	v	Birmingham
Liverpool	v	Newcastle Utd
Manchester Utd	v	WBA
Middlesbrough	v	Blackburn
Portsmouth	v	West Ham
Sunderland	v	Bolton
Wigan	v	Manchester City
Aston Villa	v	Everton

PREMIER LEAGUE

Manchester City 4 Birmingham City 1, Everton 0 Bolton 4, Wigan 3 Charlton 0, Aston Villa 0 Manchester United 2, West Ham 2 Newcastle Utd 4, Portsmouth 1 WBA 0, Fulham 2 Blackburn 1, Middlesbrough 3 Tottenham 3, Arsenal 0 Chelsea 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Chelsea	**17**	**15**	**1**	**1**	**37**	**7**	**46**
Man Utd	17	11	4	2	31	14	37
Liverpool	15	9	4	2	20	8	31
Tottenham	17	8	7	2	25	16	31
Bolton	16	9	3	4	22	14	30
Wigan	17	9	1	7	19	18	28
Man City	17	8	3	6	24	17	27
Arsenal	16	8	2	6	22	15	26
West Ham	17	7	4	6	25	22	25
Newcastle	17	7	4	6	18	17	25
Charlton	16	7	1	8	21	26	22
Blackburn	17	6	3	8	19	24	21
Middlesbrough	17	5	5	7	23	26	20
Fulham	17	5	4	8	18	22	19
Aston Villa	17	4	5	8	16	26	17
Everton	17	5	2	10	9	23	17
West Brom	17	4	4	9	17	25	16
Portsmouth	17	3	4	10	13	26	13
Birmingham	16	3	3	10	11	23	12
Sunderland	17	1	2	14	14	35	5

Football League Championship

Burnley 4 - 1 Watford, Cardiff C. 0 - 0 Derby County, Leicester C. 1 - 1 Crewe Alexandra , Luton T. 2 - 3 Stoke C, Millwall 0 - 2 Reading, Norwich C. 3 - 1 Southampton, Plymouth Argyle 2 - 0 Crystal Palace, Sheffield W. 0 - 1 Ipswich T, Wolverhampton W. 1 - 0 Leeds U

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Reading	**24**	**18**	**5**	**1**	**48**	**12**	**59**
Sheff Utd	24	16	5	3	46	21	53
Watford	24	10	9	5	39	31	39
Leeds	23	11	6	6	28	21	39
Stoke	24	12	1	11	32	34	37
Wolverhampton	24	8	11	5	29	20	35
Cardiff	24	9	8	7	33	26	35
Burnley	24	10	5	9	35	30	35
Preston	24	7	13	4	27	21	34
Luton	24	10	4	10	35	35	34
Crystal Palace	22	9	5	8	33	26	32
Southampton	23	6	13	4	26	22	31
Norwich	24	8	5	11	26	31	29
QPR	23	7	8	8	27	33	29
Ipswich	24	7	8	9	27	36	29
Derby	24	5	12	7	30	33	27
Hull	24	6	8	10	22	27	26
Leicester	23	5	10	8	26	29	25
Coventry	23	5	10	8	28	34	25
Plymouth	23	5	9	9	20	29	24
Brighton	24	3	13	8	24	36	22
Sheff Wed	24	4	8	12	17	30	20
Crewe	24	4	8	12	25	46	20
Millwall	24	3	8	13	17	37	17

Football League One

Bournemouth 2 - 1 Gillingham, Bradford C. 1 - 2 Rotherham U, Chesterfield 1 - 1 Oldham Athletic , Colchester U. 2 - 0 Milton Keynes Dons, Doncaster R. 2 - 1 Swansea C, Huddersfield T. 0 - 0 Southend U, Port Vale 0 - 1 Bristol C, Swindon T. 0 - 0 Blackpool, Tranmere R. 1 - 4 Brentford, Walsall 1 - 0 Hartlepool U, Yeovil 2 - 1 Barnsley

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Swansea	**22**	**12**	**6**	**4**	**47**	**26**	**42**
Brentford	22	11	7	4	35	23	40
Huddersfield	22	11	7	4	36	28	40
Colchester	22	10	7	5	31	22	37
Barnsley	22	10	6	6	33	22	36
Southend	22	10	6	6	34	24	36
Chesterfield	22	10	5	7	36	32	35
Doncaster	22	10	3	9	29	25	33
Bournemouth	22	9	6	7	28	25	33
Nottm Forest	22	9	4	9	27	26	31
Walsall	22	8	6	8	32	32	30
Oldham	22	8	6	8	30	35	30
Bradford	22	7	8	7	23	21	29
Hartlepool	22	8	5	9	24	27	29
Scunthorpe	22	8	4	10	37	42	28
Port Vale	22	8	4	10	22	27	28
Yeovil	22	8	4	10	27	34	28
Gillingham	22	7	5	10	19	31	26
Rotherham	22	5	7	10	25	29	22
Tranmere	22	5	7	10	24	29	22
Blackpool	22	4	10	8	28	35	22

EUROPE

TABLES AND RESULTS

What's on the Box

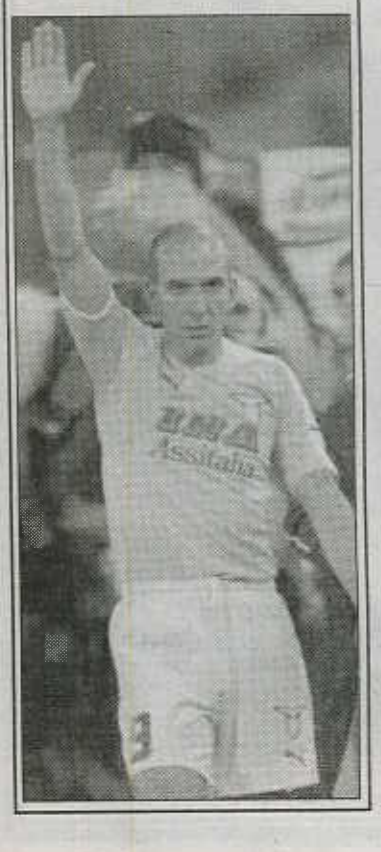
December

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Mon 26 December
Chelsea v Fulham 11.55 pm
Tue 27 December
Liverpool v Newcastle 1.55 am
Aston Villa v Everton 4.10 am
Thur 29 December
Everton v Liverpool 6.55 am
To be shown on FoxSports 11 & 12

A-LEAGUE

Thur Dec 29
Melbourne v Perth 8.00 pm
Fri Dec 30
NZ Knights v Sydney FC 6.00 pm
Sat Dec 31
CC Mariners v Newcastle 6.00 pm
Sun Jan 1
Adelaide Utd v QLD Roar 7.00 pm
NOTE
No matches scheduled from December 5 – 28 due to FIFA World Club Championship.
To be shown on Fox Channels 11 & 12



BELGIAN JUPILER LEAGUE

Mouscron 0 - 1 Club Brugge, Cercle Bruges 2 - 2 Westerlo, FC Brussels 3 - 1 Beveren, Germinal Beerschot 0 - 1 Charleroi, Racing Genk 2 - 2 Lokeren, Roeselare 1 - 1 Sint-Truiden , Zulte-Waregem 1 – AA Gent 2, La Louviere 0 – 0 Anderlecht, Lierse 0 - 2 Standard Liege

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1.Standard	**18**	**12**	**2**	**4**	**30**	**17**	**38**
2. Anderlecht	18	10	6	2	40	17	36
3. Club Brugge	18	10	5	3	28	17	35
4. Westerlo	18	9	5	4	27	14	32
5. Genk	18	8	7	3	31	21	31
6. Waregem	18	9	3	6	34	28	30
7. Lokeren	18	8	5	5	27	25	29
8. FC Brussels	18	7	7	4	23	17	28
9. AA Gent	18	7	4	7	22	23	25
10. Roeselare	18	6	5	7	29	23	23
11. Cercle	18	6	3	9	23	29	21
12. Charleroi	18	5	6	7	18	24	21
13. Excelsior	18	6	1	11	25	32	19
14. Beveren	18	6	1	11	23	30	19
15. G.B.A.	18	5	3	10	22	33	18
16. La Louviere	18	4	6	8	17	32	18
17. St-Truiden	18	4	3	11	18	29	15
18. Lierse SK	18	1	6	11	7	33	9

CROATIAN FIRST DIVISION

Winter Break

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1.Dinamo	**17**	**14**	**2**	**1**	**47**	**7**	**44**
2.Rijeka	18	11	3	4	34	23	36
3.Kamen	18	8	4	6	23	20	28
4.Varteks	18	9	1	8	30	29	28
5.Osijek	18	8	3	7	21	28	27
6.Zagreb	18	7	3	8	16	21	24
7.Cibalia	18	7	2	9	19	28	23
8.Hajduk	17	5	7	5	23	16	22
9. Medimurje	18	5	5	8	21	29	20
10.Pula SC	18	5	4	9	21	24	19
11.Slaven	18	3	6	9	20	31	15
12.Inter	18	3	4	11	11	- 30	

DUTCH EREDIVISE

Sparta Rotterdam 1 - 0 Vitesse Arnhem, PSV Eindhoven 4 - 1 Willem II Tilburg, RBC Roosendaal 0 - 2 Roda Kerkrade, SC Heerenveen 3 - 1 FC Twente Enschede, Den Haag 2 - ? Feyenoord Rotterdam 1, AZ Alkmaar 3 - 0 RKC Waalwijk, FC Groningen 3 - 0 NEC Nijmegen, Heracles Almelo 1 - 1 FC Utrech NAC Breda 0 - 2 Ajax Amsterdam

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1.AZ	**16**	**12**	**2**	**2**	**44**	**15**	**38**
2. PSV	16	12	2	2	34	11	38
3. Feyenoord	16	11	2	3	41	18	35
4. Ajax	16	8	3	5	25	14	27
5. NEC	16	8	3	5	17	16	27
6. RKC	16	8	2	6	31	30	26
7. Groningen	16	8	2	6	19	18	26
8. Heerenveen	16	7	4	5	32	26	25
9. FC Utrecht	16	7	4	5	20	17	25
10. Vitesse	16	7	2	7	27	24	23
11. Roda JC	16	6	1	9	23	31	19
12. NAC	16	5	4	7	19	27	19
13. Den Haag	16	5	3	8	18	26	18
14. FC Twente	16	5	2	9	17	20	17
15. Heracles	16	4	4	8	16	32	16
16. Sparta	16	4	3	9	15	24	15
17. Willem II	16	2	3	11	15	33	9
18. RBC	16	0	4	12	8	39	4

FRENCH LIGUE 1

Lyon 1 - 3 Lille, Auxerre 0 - 1 Nancy, Bordeaux 0 - 0 Nantes, Metz 1 - 0 Nice, Rennes 0 - 1 Saint-Etienne, Strasbourg 0 - 1 Marseille, Troyes 2 - 1 Sochaux, Lens 2 - 0 Le Mans, Monaco 1 - 0 Toulouse

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1.Lyon	**19**	**13**	**5**	**1**	**30**	**13**	**44**
2. Lens	19	7	11	1	27	14	32
3. Bordeaux	19	8	8	3	17	11	32
4. Auxerre	19	10	2	7	26	21	32
5. Monaco	19	9	4	6	19	13	31
6. Paris SG	19	9	4	6	23	18	31
7. Marseille	19	9	4	6	21	21	31
8. Lille	19	8	6	5	26	15	30
9. St Etienne	19	7	8	4	18	12	29
10. Rennes	19	8	2	9	21	30	26
11. Le Mans	19	7	4	8	17	16	25
12. Nancy	19	7	3	9	20	16	24
13. Nantes	19	6	5	8	18	20	23
14. Nice	19	5	7	7	13	17	22
15. Toulouse	19	6	4	9	18	24	22
16. Troyes	19	5	6	8	17	23	21
17. Sochaux	19	5	6	8	12	18	21
18. Metz	19	2	8	9	11	27	14
19. Ajaccio	19	2	7	10	10	23	13
20. Strasbourg	19	1	8	10	10	22	11

GERMAN BUNDESLIGA

Arminia Bielefeld 3 – 2 FC Cologne, Bayer Leverkusen 0 - 0 Hannover , Borussia Dortmund 1 - 2 Bayern Munich, Kaiserslautern 3 - 2 Wolfsburg, Mainz 1 - 1 Duisburg , Monchengladbach 4 - 3 Eintracht Frankfurt, Stuttgart 2 - 0 Schalke, Hertha BSC 1 - 1 Nurnberg, Werder Bremen 1 - 1 Hamburger SV

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1.Munchen	**17**	**14**	**2**	**1**	**35**	**12**	**44**
2. Hamburger	17	11	5	1	28	9	38
3. Bremen	17	11	3	3	46	21	36
4. Schalke	17	8	7	2	20	12	31
5. Hertha BSC	17	7	5	5	27	24	26
6. Stuttgart	17	5	10	2	21	17	25
7. Mon/bach	17	6	7	4	24	21	25
8. Hannover	17	4	9	4	26	23	21
9. Dortmund	17	5	6	6	23	24	21
10. Frankfurt	17	6	3	8	24	27	21
11. Arminia	17	5	5	7	21	25	20
12. Leverkusen	17	4	7	6	24	26	19
13. Wolfsburg	17	4	6	7	17	29	18
14. Mainz	17	4	4	9	24	26	16
15. Nurnberg	17	3	5	9	18	30	14
16. FC Koln	17	3	3	11	24	39	12
17. Duisburg	17	2	6	9	15	31	12
18. Kaiser	17	3	3	11	23	44	12

GREEK ETHNIKI KATIGORIA

Olympiakos Piraeus 1 - 0 Levadiakos, AEK Athens 2 - 1 Apollon Kalamaria, Iraklis Saloniki 1 - 0 Panionios, Kallithea 2 - 3 Atromitos, Larisa 0 - 0 Ionikos Nikea, Egaleo Athens 0 - 2 Panathinaikos, PAOK Saloniki 2 - 0 OFI Crete

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1.Olympiakos	**14**	**12**	**0**	**2**	**31**	**7**	**36**
2. AEK Athens	14	11	2	1	21	7	35
3. PAO	14	8	3	3	21	12	27
4. Xanthi	13	7	3	3	19	12	24
5. PAOK	14	6	5	3	23	13	23
6. Iraklis	14	6	3	5	16	17	21
7. Ionikos	14	4	7	3	20	19	19
8. Atromitos.	14	5	3	6	15	16	18
9. Larisa	14	4	5	5	16	17	17
10. Aigaleo	14	3	7	4	11	17	16
11. Kalamaria	14	4	3	7	12	9	15
12. OFI	14	2	6	6	9	18	12
13. Panionios	14	3	3	8	11	23	12
14. Levadiakos	14	2	5	7	9	15	11
15. Kallithea	14	1	5	8	11	22	8
16. Akratitos	13	1	4	8	6	17	7

ENGLISH FOOTBALL LEAGUE 2

Oxford U. 0 - 1 Lincoln C, Boston U. 0 - 0 Cheltenham, Bristol R. 0 - 1 Torquay U, Bury 2 - 1 Wycombe, Carlisle U. 2 - 1 Wrexham, Chester C. 1 - 2 Rushden & Diamonds Postp. Darlington - Grimsby T, Macclesfield T. 1 - 1 Barnet, Mansfield T. 0 - 0 Peterborough U, Northampton T. 1 - 0 Shrewsbury T, Notts County 2 - 0 Stockport County, Rochdale 2 - 4 Leyton Orient.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Wycombe	**22**	**10**	**11**	**1**	**40**	**23**	**41**
Grimsby	21	11	4	6	32	18	37
Carlisle	22	11	4	7	33	23	37
Leyton Orient	22	10	7	5	32	27	37
Northampton	22	8	11	3	30	20	35
Chester	22	8	9	5	38	30	33
Rochdale	22	10	3	9	41	38	33
Wrexham	22	8	7	7	33	25	31
Cheltenham	22	8	7	7	29	29	31
Notts County	22	7	9	6	24	28	30
Peterborough	22	7	8	7	27	22	29
Boston Utd	22	6	11	5	27	27	29
Lincoln City	22	6	10	6	27	26	28
Bristol Rovers	22	8	4	10	24	33	28
Bury	21	7	6	8	24	24	27
Darlington	21	6	8	7	24	22	26
Shrewsbury	21	6	8	7	26	28	26
Oxford Utd	22	6	8	8	23	28	26
Barnet	22	5	9	8	22	29	24
Mansfield	21	6	5	10	31	34	23
Rushden	21	5	7	9	21	31	22
Macclesfield	22	4	10	8	23	34	22
Torquay	22	4	7	11	24	39	19
Stockport	22	2	11	9	26	43	17

ENGLISH NATIONWIDE CONFERENCE

No matches played for winter break

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Accrington	**20**	**14**	**2**	**4**	**38**	**23**	**44**
Grays Athletic	20	11	7	2	44	24	40
Exeter	21	12	4	5	36	20	40
Morecambe	20	11	2	7	32	17	35
Halifax	20	10	5	5	28	21	35
Stevenage	19	10	4	5	33	24	34
Hereford	19	9	5	5	23	13	32
York	19	8	5	6	29	19	29
Woking	19	8	5	6	32	24	29
Gravesend	20	8	5	7	27	27	29
Aldershot	19	8	3	8	28	31	27
Cambridge	20	7	4	9	24	29	25
Burton Albion	19	7	4	8	23	28	25
Canvey Island	20	6	6	8	26	28	24
Dag & Red	20	6	5	9	27	29	23
Kidderminster	21	6	5	10	21	27	23
Altrincham	21	5	6	10	14	34	21
Crawley Town	20	5	5	10	26	33	20
Scarborough	20	5	5	10	19	31	20
Tamworth	19	4	5	10	13	29	17
Southport	19	4	3	12	19	39	15
Forest Green	19	3	5	11	17	29	14

PORTUGUSE SUPER LIGA

Associacao Naval 0 - 2 Sporting Lisbon, Amadora 1 - 2 Uniao Leiria, Belenenses 2 - 0 Pacos Ferreira, Maritimo 1 - 0 Vitoria Setubal, Rio Ave 1 - 0 Gil Vicente, Braga 2 - 0 Academica Coimbra, Benfica 1 - 0 Nacional, Porto 3 - 1 Penafiel, Boavista 1 - 1 Vitoria Guimaraes

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1.Porto	**15**	**10**	**4**	**1**	**26**	**10**	**34**
2. Nacional	15	9	3	3	17	7	30
3. Sp.Braga	15	9	2	4	15	7	29
4. Setubal	15	9	2	4	12	4	29
5. Benfica	15	8	4	3	22	12	28
6. Sporting CP	15	8	3	4	20	16	27
7. Boavista	15	5	8	2	21	14	23
8. Pacos	15	6	3	6	17	18	21
9. Rio Ave	15	5	5	5	20	21	20
10. Maritimo	15	4	6	5	16	17	18
11. Uniao	15	5	3	7	18	20	18
12. Academica	15	5	3	7	14	20	18
13. Belenenses	15	5	2	8	15	17	17
14. Estrela	15	4	4	7	11	15	16
15. Vicente	15	4	2	9	11	18	14
16. Guimaraes	15	4	2	9	9	21	14
17. Naval	15	3	2	10	13	25	11
18. Penafiel	15	1	4	10	11	26	7

SCOTTISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Postp. Dundee United - Dunfermline, Falkirk 1 - 2 Kilmarnock, Hibernian 2 - 1 Motherwell, Livingston 0 - 0 Aberdeen, Rangers 1 - 0 Hearts, Inverness C.T. 1 - 1 Celtic

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Celtic	**19**	**14**	**3**	**2**	**48**	**17**	**45**
Hearts	19	12	5	2	34	13	41
Hibernian	19	12	1	6	34	23	37
Rangers	19	8	6	5	30	22	30
Kilmarnock	19	8	5	6	35	30	29
Inverness CT	19	5	9	5	21	21	24
Aberdeen	19	5	8	6	21	22	23
Motherwell	19	6	5	8	31	36	23
Dundee Utd	18	4	6	8	19	28	18
Falkirk	19	4	5	10	20	35	17
Livingston	19	2	6	11	10	35	12
Dunfermline	18	2	3	13	10	31	9

SPANISH PRIMERA LIGA

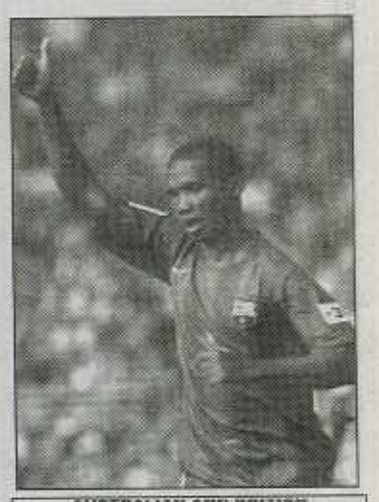
Athletic Bilbao 2 - 0 Real Betis, Celta de Vigo 0 - 3 Deportivo La Coruna , Cadiz 1 - 3 Barcelona, Deportivo Alaves 0 - 1 Valencia, Espanyol 2 - 2 Zaragoza, Racing Santander 1 - 1 Malaga, Sevilla 3 - 2 Real Sociedad, Villarreal 2 - 1 Getafe, Mallorca 2 - 2 Atletico Madrid, Real Madrid 1 - 1 Osasuna

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1.Barcelona	**16**	**11**	**4**	**1**	**41**	**14**	**37**
2. Osasuna	16	11	2	3	23	15	35
3. Real Madrid	16	9	2	5	28	17	29
4. Villarreal	16	8	5	3	25	16	29
5. Deportivo	16	8	5	3	23	14	29
6. Valencia	16	8	5	3	23	17	29
7. Sevilla	16	7	5	4	17	12	26
8. Celta	16	8	2	6	18	19	26
9. Getafe	16	6	3	7	22	23	21
10. Atletico	16	4	7	5	17	17	19
11. Zaragoza	16	3	9	4	17	20	18
12. Sociedad	16	5	3	8	24	34	18
13. Malaga	16	4	4	8	22	23	16
14. Racing	16	3	7	6	12	19	16
15. Mallorca	16	4	4	8	16	25	16
16. Athletic	16	3	6	7	16	20	15
17. Espanyol	16	3	6	7	13	20	15
18. Cadiz	16	3	5	8	11	19	14
19. Alaves	16	2	6	8	14	24	12
20. Betis	16	2	6	8	10	24	12

TURKISH FIRST DIVISION

Kayserispor 1 - 3 Galatasaray, Ankaragucu 0 - 0 Sivasspor, Malatyaspor 2 - 0 Gaziantepspor , Fenerbahce 6 - 2 Denizlispor, Ankaraspor 1 - 1 Erciyesspor, Diyarbakirspor 0 - 0 Samsunspor, Konyaspor 1 - 1 Manisaspor, Rizespor 1 - 1 Genclerbirligi, Besiktas 0 - 1 Trabzonspor

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1.Fenerbahce	17	14	3	0	43	17	45
2. Galatasaray	17	13	2	2	39	17	41
3. Kayserispor	17	9	2	6	30	22	29
4. Genclerbirligi	17	6	7	4	21	12	25
5. Besiktas	17	7	4	6	24	19	25
6. Sivasspor	17	6	7	4	19	17	25
7. Erciyesspor	17	5	8	4	17	19	23
8. Trabzonspor	17	6	5	6	21	24	23
9. Konyaspor	17	5	7	5	22	18	22
10.Gantepspor	17	5	6	6	22	27	21
11. Manisaspor	17	5	5	7	21	23	20
12. Ankaragucu	17	4	7	6	19	21	19
13. Diyakirspor	17	5	3	9	16	30	18
14. Ankaraspor	17	3	8	6	22	24	17
15. Malatyaspor	17	4	5	8	14	27	17
16. Rizespor	17	3	6	8	13	23	15
17. Samsunspor	17	3	5	9	27	37	14
18. Denizlispor	17	3	4	10	12	25	13



The Tuesday Interview

SYDNEY FC DOES AUSTRALIA PROUD

By Marc Fox

With Dwight Yorke as its talisman, Sydney FC will have won plenty of admirers after bowing out of the Club World Championships with a fifth-place playoff win over African champions Al Ahly. On a platform for the game's emerging confederations to showcase their rapid rise towards the summit of world football, Sydney proved their value both as a club and as representatives of the A-League in Japan last week.

Furthermore, Pierre Littbarski side's controlled performances ratified Australia's imminent relocation to the AFC. They may even have made the local Japanese supporters that braved freezing conditions think twice about its national team's ease of progression from Group F in the World Cup next year. In a tournament the whole football world held an interest, Sydney played with a passion and maturity few commentators might have expected for a club just a year old.

Five years ago in the first Club World Championship in Brazil, South Melbourne played well but failed to win a match. The fact that Sydney outplayed Deportivo Saprissa for swathes of its quarter-final before being downed in the second-half, and defeated Ahly surely highlights the domestic game's progress here.

Following on the coattails of World Cup qualification and subsequent grouping with

Brazil, the World Club Championship was another timely opportunity to have Australian football banded around the world media. Once again, Yorke's influence overseas - especially in England - was evident as UK broadsheets The Times and The Daily Telegraph both carried stories about the former Manchester United striker the day of Liverpool's semi-final against Saprissa.

In 2000 South Melbourne had a true Aussie icon in Paul Trimboli but Sydney's Dwight Yorke proved his worth as a genuine world-class star. Such acclamations cannot be earned on the football pitch alone. The Trinidad and Tobago captain's media savvy and positive attitude captivates audiences. 12 months ago Yorke was becoming a laughing stock in England as he bounced from Blackburn to Birmingham, seemingly to obscurity. Now he is captaining a World Cup side and a CWC representative.

Playing in an unfamiliar deep-lying playmaker role in midfield, when Yorke was at his most prominent so was Sydney. His energy and range of passing against Saprissa for the first hour was admirable. So too his skill and understanding in the dying moments of the playoff match. He captained the side with verve and enthusiasm.

"I thought we deserved that," Yorke said after beating Ahly.

"We played very well in the first game and got beaten but today we played with courage and managed to hang in there and defeat a very good football team. We are a young team and we are learning how to play and today showed we have made a lot of improvement."

As Yorke alluded to, the first game against Saprissa was characterised by long periods of Sydney possession punctuated with the conceding of a sloppy goal immediately after the half-time break. Sydney was left to rue not taking the lead after controlling the majority of the opening stages. Sasho Petrovski and local legend Kazuyoshi Miura linked intelligently upfront all night long but failed to test goalkeeper Jose Porras as much as its possession deserved.

Showing a clear desire to guide Sydney into a semi-final tussle with Liverpool, former Everton trainee David Carney also grafted more than at any point this season. The 22-year-old was a constant menace on the right-hand side sparking calls from Littbarski for Carney to be called up to the Socceroo squad. Keeper Clint Bolton also improved his chances of a national team call-up will two outstanding second-half one-on-one stops after Alvin Ceccoli had been somewhat harshly awarded a straight red card for dangerous play.

"It was disappointing to play so well and come so close but not come away with the win," former San Frecce Hiroshima midfielder Steve Corica reflected afterwards.

"I thought we showed tonight that we belong on this stage and this level of football. In some ways it hurts even more because we know we should have won the game."

In game two against the African champions, perhaps the reverse was true. Al Ahly, a club supported by twice the population of Australia and who was recently crowned CAF club of the century, dominated the opening exchanges. But it was Yorke who headed Sydney into an 35th minute lead from Corica's free-kick and Carney who dispatched the winner. Ahly will wonder how they didn't score again following striker Emad Motab's leveller on the cusp of half-time. But again Bolton rose to every challenge and Yorke and Miura showed tactical maturity when it most mattered.

"It was important that we won that game because it shows we can not only play well on this stage but win close games," Littbarski said. "This was a great win by a team that is improving all the time.

"It was also good to see how we played under a lot of pressure because Al Ahly were a very good opponent and they made us work hard. I thought they dominated the first periods of the game but we defended well and fought our way into the game.

"We managed to score two good goals and it was a good way to finish off the tournament. We wanted to win to leave a good last impression and I think we have been able to do that."

Whether beneficial in the eyes of the FFA, Sydney's displays will have made overseas suitors take notice of the talent available in the A-League.

Reports suggest the J-League has its eye on one or two of Littbarski's squad and how long before Japanese scouts realise that Adelaide United and Newcastle Jets are every bit Sydney's match. In addition, some outstanding individual impressions will have done the likes of Bolton and Petrovski's international chances no harm.

Mark Milligan might also be a surprise selection for either the Asian Cup qualifiers or pre-World Cup friendlies in early 2006.

"We are proud of what we did and we are happy with the way we represented Sydney FC and Australia," Littbarski beamed.

But the German coach knows as much as anyone the focus reverts back to domestic duties. After four well-earned days off, the side will regroup ahead of December 30's trip to New Zealand. Back to reality with a bang.

Sydney FC's starting squad in the match against Deportivo Saprissa served Australia well in Japan